

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, January 18, 2014

PRELUDE "I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord" - Jason W. Krug Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Open Your Hearts" - Kim Shirey 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 First Corinthians 15 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from 1 Corinthians 15)

This is how it is with the resurrection of the dead:

The body is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.

It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.

It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable.

Then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye,

The trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised.

When this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.

But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Let us pray... Lord of Life and Light, lead us to faith beyond sight, trust beyond doubt, and deeds beyond words, so that we may live free from fear with a living and unconquerable hope. Into the midst of doubts and troubles we bring with us to worship here today, speak to us now your word which does not change and heal our troubled hearts. May our thoughts so center on your message that light has come to chase away shadow and darkness, that we might share that light with the world and enable others to see the truth of Easter by the way we live in the world. In the name of our Risen Savior, we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "Christ Is Alive!", number 108 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE "Christ Is Alive!" *The Hymnal #108*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

How quickly we forget that we are an Easter people, raised up from the ways of death into fullness of life. In penitence and faith, let us confront the power of sin and death that leaves us shaken and afraid and confess all that keeps us from living the abundant life Christ offers each of us as, we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of the living, we confess that we succumb to the temptation to limit our notion of "reality" only to what we can see and touch. In so doing, we allow ourselves to remain ensnared by destructive habits, crippled by fear, and imprisoned by painful memories. We want to believe, but our old ways of measuring truth and determining what is real distances us from embracing the good news of your resurrection. Help thou our unbelief so that we may embrace the blessing of Easter and the peace of Christ. Forgive us for living without hope, when you have demonstrated your faithfulness and made known the extent of your love for us and for all you have made. Cut away the grave clothes that bind us and raise us to new life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

If we walk in the light as Christ is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin... 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**

Jesus' first words to his shaken disciples are always the same-- "Peace be with you." Having had a fears and doubts set to rest, let us share Christ's peace with one another. 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 preacher will take a seat.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

(All Singing)

**Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.**

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

"I would invite you to stand as you are able and join in singing our second hymn this morning, "I Danced in the Morning", number 302 in our hymnals supplement."

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

***HYMN OF PREPARATION**

"I Danced in the Morning"

The Hymnal #302

The liturgist will invite the congregation to, "Be seated," and then say....

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Among the first Christians, there were no needy people because those who had enough brought their resources to be shared. Out of the rich legacy they have passed on to us, we bring our tithes and offerings in thanksgiving for all God's gifts. 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

"Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" - Fred Bock

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 promise, Easter gives us confidence and hope that you are changing us and the world into a new creation with Christ. We make this offering to symbolize our commitment to participate in your intention for our lives, the church, and the world. Bless these gifts and use them for your redemptive purposes, 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.

THE ANTHEM "The Old Rugged Cross" - Bennard/Wright/Courtney The Choir

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our Gospel lesson for this morning is taken from the twentieth chapter of John, beginning with the nineteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #945 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God... On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

Now Thomas, one of the twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and place my finger in the mark of the nails, and place my hand in his side, I will not believe."

Eight days later, his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. The doors were shut, but Jesus came and stood among them, and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side; do not be faithless, but believing."

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.

*The liturgist will take his/her seat. Or, if you prefer,
you may return to the congregation to sit with your family.*

Thanks for your service.

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The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our Sermon text this morning is taken from Paul's letter to the church at Rome, the eighth chapter, beginning with the eighteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #983 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for

adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience."

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“The Undying Hope”

Thomas had always been such a brave and loyal follower of Jesus. When Jesus made the decision to go back to Bethany to raise his friend Lazarus, he did it knowing that the priests, scribes, and Pharisees would be waiting for him, looking for any excuse to arrest and kill him. That particular danger didn't seem to concern Jesus, but it struck fear into the hearts of his disciples. Whatever awful end lay ahead for Jesus, Thomas wasn't going to let him face it alone. So Thomas patted his trusty sidearm and said, "Let's go and die with him!" Having spent his life waiting for the Messiah, Thomas was willing to spend his life for him.

But then, Jesus died, murdered by the same crooked bunch that he had hoped so fervently would be killed themselves. Nicodemus and Joseph took the body down off the cross, laid it in the tomb, and rolled the stone over the entrance to seal it.

It doesn't really say so in the Bible, but more than Jesus was buried in that tomb. The hope of the disciples-- especially Thomas, were buried with him. It was bad enough that Jesus was dead, but it was almost unbearable that Thomas hopes and dreams were graveyard dead with him. Thomas had been prepared to die with Jesus, but he was no where near ready to live without him.

What got released on Sunday was hope. Not hope that life would turn out well. Not even hope that there will be life after death. Hope that called people to die: die to selfishness and sin and fear and greed, die to the lesser life of a lesser self so that a greater self might be born. And many people did.

This hope changed things. Pliny the Younger said that followers of Jesus began to meet on Sunday instead of on the Sabbath as had always been the case. John called the first day of the week "the Lord's day." The followers of Jesus began to understand themselves to be a kind of resurrection community. God who had created life was beginning to recreate it. God in Jesus was saying, "Let there be life," all over again.

The hope of resurrection is woven into a thousand stories. One of the stories I love most is called *The Shawshank Redemption*. (The last word in the title is the first clue of where the story is headed.) The hero, Andy Dufresne, initially underwhelms the narrator Red: "I must admit I didn't think much of Andy the first time I laid eyes on him Looked like a stiff breeze could blow him over."

Dufresne is unjustly arrested, tried, condemned, and beaten. But as we watch him through Red's eyes, something like wonder begins to grow. In a brutal world he is kind. He is a man of hidden strengths who creates a library and helps his captors with their taxes. He is anxious for nothing: "Strolls like a man in a park without a care or a worry," says Red. He ascends to a high place (the warden's office) and plays Mozart over the intercom, and for a transcendent moment; every prisoner stands motionless in unexpected glory. And Red confesses: "Those voices soared. Higher and farther than anybody in a gray place dares to dream ... for the briefest of moments - every last man at Shawshank feels free."

Andy is persecuted by the warden, a pharisaical hypocrite who hands him a Bible and tells him "Salvation lies within."

In the end, salvation does lie in the Bible. The Bible is where Andy hides the small hammer with which he chips to freedom. (The cutout space in the warden's Bible where Andy hides the chisel begins on the first page of Exodus, the story of God liberating his people from bondage.)

Andy descends into hell. He crawls to freedom through five hundred yards of prison sewer pipe half filled with sewage and comes out the other side cleansed by the river and the rain and raising his hands bathed in light and freedom. If you can't see the resurrection, you haven't been watching. His empty cell is the beginning of the end for the regime of the warden.

Andy, the Christ figure, and Red, the noble pagan, have a running argument about hope. Andy says that music is important in a prison - maybe more important in a prison than anywhere else, because it reminds hearers that there is an unseen reality the powers of the prison cannot touch.

Red asks what he's talking about. *Hope.*

Red says hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive a man insane.

Andy says hope is a good thing, maybe the best thing, and no good thing ever dies.

Now, the ancient Greeks lined up with Red. There is one art form, wrote Alain de Botton, that dedicates itself to telling stories of great failure without judgment or mockery. Tragedy was invented by the Greeks. The first traces of drama come from Greek religious ceremonies involving the sacrifice of goats; the word *tragedy* itself comes from the Greek words for "goat" and "song."

The purpose of tragedy is the moral elevation of the audience by reflecting on how the fate of the hero could be their fate. Aristotle said that in a good tragedy, the hero has to be neither perfect nor evil but someone we can identify with. The tragedian's task is to confront us with the inconvenient truth that we are capable of any folly. A good tragedy will leave the spectator sympathetic and humble.

The invention of tragedy was an enormous moral gift to the human race. Tragedy teaches that suffering can help us grow. The ancients taught that reason is noble because it enables human beings to endure suffering with patience and courage and therefore grow stronger. Suffering can build character so that the wise person can be ruled by reason in an uncaring and harsh world.

The apostle Paul appeared to concur with this idea when he wrote to the church at Rome: "We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character." But at the end he added as a climax what would never have occurred to a noble pagan: "*and character [produces] hope.*"

No nonchristian ancient writer would have added that. The goal of life was to seek to live by reason and courage in a universe governed by uncaring necessity. Nietzsche said that: "In truth, [hope] is the most evil of evils because it prolongs man's torment."

Hope is a dangerous thing. Hope can drive you insane.

Paul added it for one reason. He believed that Jesus, who came to set the prisoners free, had now triumphed over death. Death is the way to life.

In *The Shawshank Redemption*, though, Red finds out paradoxically that when he leaves prison, life without hope cannot sustain him. His options are suicide or return to prison, except for a promise he made to his friend Andy. He does what Andy had asked. And at the foot of a tree, Red finds that his friend has paid, out of treasure Andy acquired through suffering, for Red to join him off the coast of Mexico, free and full of hope. In the final images, we see Andy, Red's friend, dressed in white, rehabbing a fishing boat at the edge of a long coastline next to the blue Pacific. Red's narration closes the movie:

I am so excited I can barely sit still or hold a thought in my head I hope I can make it across the border.

I hope to see my friend and shake his hand.

I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams.

I hope

I think of the change Jesus brought to the world around hope when I think about two tombstones. One of them marks the resting place of Mel Blanc, the famous voice of countless characters in *Looney Tunes* cartoons. In accordance with his instructions, his family inscribed as his final epitaph the words that he had said to end a thousand cartoons: "*That's all, folks.*"

The other tombstone is described by Philip Yancey. It marks the grave of a friend's grandmother who lies buried under ancient oak trees in the cemetery of a church in rural Louisiana. In accordance with the grandmother's instructions, only one word is inscribed on the tombstone: *Waiting*.

For in this hope we were saved. It is a very good thing. And if we hope, we wait for the fulfillment of that undying hope with patience.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, more than anyone, you know all the things of which we are afraid-- the terrors that come by night, and the storms that thunder and threaten us by day. Only you know the why and the when of those calamities that strike us unaware and too often find us without a vital faith or a ready hope.

But we also know that you did not intend for us to live in fear or in despair. Your hope arises new with each dawn, pushing back the rubble of our lives. Each new day reminds us of your grace, you paint hope across our skies. Into the deafening cry of hopelessness you whisper love. Love that catches us, holds us. There is no end, just new beginnings. No finish, just new starts.

Into your resurrection we follow you to bathe in hope. You are alive! Not only in the world but in us. And so as we carry your hope within our souls, help us to lift our eyes, and feel resurrection hope arise in our lives.

We know that you have not promised to surround us with immunity from all the ills to which flesh is heir. We only pray that when they come, if come they must, they shall find us unafraid and with adequate resources to meet them. Give us a constant faith and a steady courage, so that we may neither whine in self pity nor in peevish petulance complain before Thee.

We are grateful that you still rule over the world that you have made. Kings and presidents may come and go, yet not all the shouting, nor the tumult, nor the screaming hurricanes of time have diverted you from your true and chosen course, and that you will work all things together for good to them that love you, who are called according to your purpose, 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 all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of invitation, "Because He Lives", printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Because He Lives"

God sent his Son, they called him Jesus; he came to love, heal, and forgive;
He lived and died to buy my pardon, an empty grave is there to prove my Savior lives. *Refrain:*

*Because he lives, I can face tomorrow; because he lives, all fear is gone;
Because I know he holds the future, and life is worth the living just because he lives.*

How sweet to hold a newborn baby, and feel the pride and joy he gives;
But greater still the clam assurance, this child can face uncertain days because he lives. *Refrain:*

And then one day I'll cross the river; I'll fight life's final war with pain;
And then as death gives way to victory, I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know he reigns. *Refrain:*

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Eagles' 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