

**Sunday, April 15th, 2018**

*A couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am, the liturgist will enter and take his/her seat on the Chancel. The pastor will enter after a short prayer with the choir, offer a welcome, 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.*

**PRELUDE**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP**

**The Choir**

*After the Choral Call to Worship, the liturgist should step to the lectern & say,*

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 138 and printed in our bulletins?"

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 138)

I will give thanks to you, O Lord, with my whole heart;

**I will bow down toward your holy temple & praise your Name,**

I will praise you because of your love and faithfulness;

**For you have glorified your Name & your word above all things.**

When I called, you answered me; you increased my strength within me.

**Great is the glory of the Lord.**

Though the Lord be high, he cares for the lowly; and perceives the haughty from afar.

**Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you keep me safe;**

Stretch forth your hand, O Lord, against my enemies & do not abandon the works of your hands.

**Your right hand shall deliver me from their fury and save me.**

The Lord will make good his purpose for me.

**O Lord, your love endures for ever.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Mighty Father, we gather as your church, called to confess you as Lord and Savior to a world that knows you not; called to be the body of Christ to serve the poor, the sick, the imprisoned and "the least of these"; called to exercise our variety and abundance of gifts to further your will, not ours; and called to proclaim, like Peter, the truth of who you are. Grant us, we pray, clarity of purpose, courage of conviction, and compassion for those who have lost their way. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "I Danced in the Morning", number 302 in our *Hymnal*.

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

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE**

"I Danced in the Morning"

The Hymnal #302

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

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

Is Christ the Lord of your life? Is the primary focus and concern of your life to follow in His steps and reflect the love of God revealed in Jesus? Doubtless, we would like to say yes, but we know that each of us has failed, sometimes miserably. With the full assurance of faith, let us confess our failures before God and one another, praying together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, Let us pray...

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

Sovereign Lord, we confess that we pray "thy kingdom come, on earth as it is in heaven" but we cannot say "as it is in us," for we know our sinfulness. We confess that we have lived and

worked as though we are accountable to ourselves alone. We have acted as though by our own good deeds we could work our way to heaven. We confess that we have fought to defend ourselves as though we had no defender. Forgive us and help us to remember that with you, Lord of the Universe, all things are possible and that you do work good in all things for those who love and trust you. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION

*Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Christ came to dispel confusion with truth; to bring peace into tumult, and defeat sorrow with stubborn joy. In Christ's kingdom, there is no rejection or vengeance, but only the glorious assurance that sin and death have no more dominion over us, because Jesus reigns!... 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

Through the sacrifice of Jesus, we have been reconciled to the Father. If you have hurt someone else, ask them for forgiveness. If you have been wronged by another, offer them the same. Let us share the peace of Christ with one another. The peace of Christ be with you... The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

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

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike.”

*The liturgist will take a seat.*

CHILDREN'S SERMON

*(All Singing)*

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

Put on a mask, like the one that the Lone Ranger or Zorro wears, and ask the children if they know who you are. Remind them that many superheroes wear masks so that people won't know their true identities. Ask them if they know the name of the person under the Batman mask (Bruce Wayne). Find out if they know the true identity of Spiderman (Peter Parker). Then ask if they know the true identity of Jesus. Point out that one of the disciples, the one named Peter, discovered the true identity of Jesus when he said, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16). Explain that a messiah is a king, so he is a very powerful person, but Jesus is more than just an earthly king — he is the Son of God. Ask the children if they look up to superheroes like Batman and Spiderman. Then invite them to look up to Jesus, who is an even more powerful superhero, and who has come to earth to save each one of us. Close by saying that the true identity of Jesus used to be a secret, but it isn't any longer: Jesus is the Messiah.

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

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

Together as a church under the lordship of Jesus Christ, we are called to address the world

with good news that uplifts, inspires, and transforms. Our offerings make this work possible, so let us give with cheerful and obedient hearts 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**

**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... Sovereign God, we make this offering in the name of our King, Jesus, with the prayer that his reign may become reality in the lives of the needy and the rich, the oppressed and the oppressor, the defenseless and the defender-- all who are victims of the evil in this world. Accept our gifts and follow them with your blessing so that all your children may be freed to experience Jesus' power and live in his truth. Amen.

### **\*THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostle's Creed"

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

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

*Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.*

## **THE ANTHEM**

**The Choir**

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

## **SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson this morning is taken from John's First Letter, the fourth chapter from the eleventh to the fourteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1067 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

No man has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his own Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God."

*The liturgist will return to his/her seat with family or friends in the congregation.*

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

Our sermon text for today is taken from the Gospel of Matthew, the sixteenth chapter, begin-

ning at the thirteenth verse. If you would like to follow along in your pew bibles, you can find it on page 850. Listen once more for the Word of God:

“Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do men say that the Son of man is?”

And they said, “Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

He said to them, “But who do **you** say that I am?”

Simon Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And Jesus answered him, “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ. From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.

And Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, “God forbid, Lord! This shall never happen to you.” But he turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me; for you are not on the side of God, but of men.”

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

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

THE SERMON

“The Greatest Question”

Rev. Mike Morgan

A BBC magazine answered the “101 greatest questions of all time.” Among the earth shattering questions answered were: “**Do men have cellulite?**” and the answer for which all of us have been waiting desperately is “Yes. It's not just women who are cursed with orange peel skin, although in men cellulite tends to be in different places, usually around the neck and abdomen.”

However, the #1 “greatest question” was “Where is the safest place to stand outside in a thunderstorm?” And, in case you must know the answer, it is “A car or other enclosed metal structure is the safest place to be in a thunderstorm.”

Jesus asked a question that should have been first on the list. Jesus had been with his disciples in the area of Galilee. They headed north about 25 miles to a place called Caesarea Philippi, which was named after Herod's son, Philip. Actually, Philip, not one for modesty, named it after himself. The region was known as a cultic high place of worship to the god Pan who was half goat, half man. It's where we get the words pandemonium and panic.

But Caesarea Philippi was way more than that. Call it the shopping mall of religion. Once it had been a center of Baal worship. A temple was located there dedicated to the worship of Caesar. And other temples of Syrian gods dotted the landscape. There were plenty of gods to choose from in Caesarea Philippi.

So Jesus asks his disciples this question: “Who do others say that I am?”. It was an easy question to answer for them. They had nothing on the line. Their answer required no commitment from them or even knowledge on their part. Little wonder that their answers came back in rapid fire: “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.”

But Jesus was more concerned with **their** opinion. So he asked, so he upped the ante and asked them to go all in: “Who do **you** say I am?”

They had heard the speculation about John the Baptist. John had been beheaded by this point, but his death haunted Herod like no other evil thing he had ever done-- and there were many.

Some religious types thought he might be Elijah? He did not die. He was taken up never to be seen again. Every time they celebrated the Passover, they kept one seat empty and opened the door to let Elijah in. His coming would signal the coming of the Messiah. So... maybe he's back.... or some other prophet. But notice Jesus isn't interested in what others think. He looks at his disciples and says, "I want to know, what do **you** believe?" Wow. They've just been asked the question that serves as the foundation for this entire story. Everything hinges on their answer.

We don't know how long they thought and Jesus waited in the uncomfortable silence before Peter replied, "You are the Messiah, the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Who do you say he is? Have you given it much thought? Some today think that he was crazy, a lunatic claiming to be God. Others think he was a first century scam artist, just another liar, deviously and purposefully misleading those around him for his own need for power, wealth, or adulation.

The question reverberates through history about Jesus: "Who is this guy?" They had all seen Peter, at Jesus' bidding, walk on water. They had all helped feed over 5000 people with the content of a child's lunch box. They had seen him heal the blind, the lame, the leprosy. He had even raised the dead daughter of Jairus. They had witnessed huge crowds of thousands, leave their homes and places of work to come out to the wilderness and listen to this man teach and preach. They loved it and came back for more.

"Who is Jesus?" Every thoughtful person has to raise and answer this question.

If you believe, as Peter did, as I do, that Jesus IS the Messiah, the Son of the living God...

**The Son of the God who lives, lives in you.**

Listen to this from I John 4:15: "If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God."

If you are facing trouble in this life, you don't face it alone. The Son of the God who lives, lives in you. If you're trying to mend a broken relationship, you don't mend it alone. The Son of the God who lives, lives in you. If you're looking for a job, you don't look alone. If you're grieving a loss, you don't grieve alone.

**Jesus can show you who he is.**

If you're still searching to discover the true identity of Jesus, you don't search alone. The Son of the living God, who wants to live in you, will help you just like he helped Peter. Jesus tells Peter, "You didn't come up with this on your own. It has been **shown to you** by the Father in heaven."

**He can also help you discover who you are.**

After Peter confesses Jesus, Jesus responds: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."

You see, Jesus not only telling them who he is. He is telling them who they are. I tell you that you are Peter.

Jesus is not saying he's building his church on Peter, but the truth Peter revealed. Peter would have his ups and downs. He would struggle with Jesus talking about his death. Even after proclaiming Jesus as the son of God, it's Peter who denies Jesus three times fearing for his own life.

But Jesus could see what Peter couldn't. He could see Peter's story all the way to the end.

He can see your story as well. Don't like the way your story is going? Would you let him

show you the other side of your story?

There is only one star of your story-- **and most surprisingly, it is NOT you!** Your life is about HIM! Everybody has something in them that wants to stand in the spotlight at center stage to create an identity for themselves or let someone else stand in the center and tell them who they are but that place is only reserved for one. Only the one and only son gets to tell you who you are. That place is reserved for the Son of the God who lives.

The reason we love being in the center of our story is that we can say what goes. My body is my body. My time is my time. My resources. My money, gifts, and talents are mine. However, I will caution you. Standing in the center of your story may sound tempting but it comes at a high price-- life in the spotlight brings exhaustion and anxiety.

If you want peace, step out of the center of your story and invite Jesus to his rightful place. He will not force himself into the center of your story but he will never pass up an invitation.

Life will never make sense as long as we stand in the center of our story. Focused on our wants, our desires, our needs.

A Jewish Rabbi once invited a seeker who was looking to find more meaning and purpose in his life to read Exodus 20:17, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain".

"Don't think language; think lifestyle;" the Rabbi instructed. "The command calls us to elevate the name or reputation of God to the highest place. We exist to give honor to his name. May I illustrate?"

And with that, he proceeded to tell a parable involving a large company headquartered in Manhattan skyscraper. Everyone in the building works for the CEO, who offices on the top floor. Most have not seen him, but they have seen his daughter. She works in the building for her father. She exploits her family position to her benefit.

One morning she approaches Bert, the building lobby's security guard. "I'm hungry, Bert. Go down the street and buy me a Danish."

The demand places Bert in a quandary. He's on duty.

Leaving his post puts the building at risk. But his boss's daughter insists, "Come on, now; hurry up."

What option does he have? As he leaves, he says nothing but thinks something like, if the daughter is so bossy, what does that say about her father?

She's only getting started. Munching on her muffin, she bumps into a paper-laden secretary. "Where are you going with all those papers?"

"To have them bound for an afternoon meeting." "Forget the meeting. Come to my office and vacuum the carpet."

"But I was told ... "

"And I am telling you something else."

The woman has no choice. After all, this is the boss's daughter speaking. Which causes the secretary to question the wisdom of the boss.

And on the daughter goes. Making demands. Calling shots. Interrupting schedules. Never invoking the name of her dad. Never leveraging her comments with, "My dad said ... "

No need to.

Isn't she the boss's child? Doesn't the child speak for the father? And so Bert abandons his post. An assistant fails to finish a task. And more than one employee questions the wisdom of the man upstairs. Does he really know what he is doing? They wonder.

The rabbi then proceeded to recast the story with the addition of a second daughter.

Rather than demand a muffin from Bert, she brings a muffin to Bert. "I thought of you this morning," she explains. "You arrive so early. Do you have time to eat?" And she hands him the gift.

En route to the elevator she bumps into a woman with an armful of documents. "My, I'm sorry. Can I help?" the daughter offers. The assistant smiles, and the two carry the stacks down the hallway.

And so the daughter engages each of the company's employees she encounters. She asks about their families, offers to bring them coffee. New workers are welcomed, and hard workers are applauded. She, through kindness and concern, raises the happiness level of the entire company.

She does so not even mentioning her father's name. Never does she declare, "My father says ... " There is no need to. Is she not his child? Does she not speak on his behalf? Reflect his heart? When she speaks, they assume she speaks for him. And because they think highly of her, they think highly of her father.

They've not seen him. They've not met him. But they know his child, so they know his heart.

May God rescue us from self-centered thinking. May we have no higher goal than to see someone think more highly of our Father, our King. After all, it's not about ... well, you can finish the sentence.

Do you want to know how the story ends?

"The second daughter takes the elevator to the top floor to see her father. When she arrives, he is waiting in the doorway. He's aware of her good works and has seen her kind acts. People think more highly of him because of her. And he knows it. As she approaches, he greets her with six words."

What are they? I urged, never expecting to hear an orthodox Jew quote Jesus.... "Well done, good and faithful servant."

May God sustain you until you hear the same.

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

O God, we thank you for your love, a love seen in your Son who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow his commands.

Help us diminish so you might increase; to die to self so that we may come to life for you; to empty ourselves so that you might fill us with your Spirit and your power. Remind us Lord of the thousands of people in the world this year who will give up their freedom, their opportunities, indeed their very lives for your sake and for the sake of the gospel and grant us the zeal and the faith that they show. May our weakness be filled with your strength as a testimony to your power. Take our thoughts and our feelings - and remake them so that they are like your Son's - and fill us with your wisdom so that we may be able to know and approve of your good and perfect will.

Father, help us to offer all of ourselves to you. Make us willing to take our place among your people - to care for them and to love them. May we be salt and light for them as Christ has always been for us. All of this we pray in the name of 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 & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Lift High the Cross", hymn #3711 in our *Hymnal*.

\*HYMN

"Lift High the Cross"

*The Hymnal* #371

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love"

We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand.

We will walk with each other; we will walk hand in hand.

And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.

And they'll know we are Christians by our love, By our love.

Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis