

Sunday, April 23rd, 2017

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 and take his/her seat. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, 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.

PRELUDE "Christ, Our Hope and Our Joy" - J.S. Bach **Dr. Elizabeth Davis**
CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema **The Choir**

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from First Peter 1 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from First Peter 1)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

We have received an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us.

We are being protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this we rejoice, even if for a little while we have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of our faith may be found to result in praise and glory & honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.

Although we have not seen him, we love him; and even though we do not see him now, we believe in him & rejoice for we are receiving the outcome of our faith, the salvation of our souls.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

God of the resurrection, we thank you for the new life you have given Jesus and all who follow him. Through the power of your Spirit, inspire us through a fresh hearing of your Word and outpouring of your Spirit to make a leap of faith into your loving arms. May we believe the words of Scripture when they speak of your victory over death, and may we accept the promises you make for our future. Lead us to faith beyond sight, trust beyond doubt, deeds beyond words, that we may live as your forgiven and forgiving children. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Thine Is the Glory”, number 122 in our Hymnal.

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

***HYMN OF PRAISE** “Thine Is the Glory” *The Hymnal #122*

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 out of the ways of death into fullness of life. The power of death may leave us shaken and afraid, but God in Christ calls us out of our fear to experience a presence that embraces us with eternal hope. Let us confess now all that stands between us and the abundant life offered by Christ as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

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 precludes our 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, and cut away the grave clothes that bind us that we may be

raised to new life through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Let our hearts be glad and our tongues rejoice, for the Living Christ is in our midst to raise us from guilt and shame to freedom and joy. We have been given a new birth into a living hope... Friends believe the Good News!

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

*GLORIA PATRI

The Hymnal #579

Glory be to the Father, & to the Son, & to the Holy Ghost;

As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, World without end. Amen, Amen.

*PASSING OF THE PEACE

Christ enters the dark places of our lives and shines the light of his grace into them, bringing us all faith, hope, joy, and 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, preacher 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 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 return to the lectern and say...*

“Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “Thomas’ Song” which is printed in our bulletins. Since this one may be unfamiliar to many of us, Dan is going to lead us in its singing.

*HYMN OF PREPARATION

“Thomas’ Song”

Jesus, You were all to me, why did You die on Calvary?
O Lamb of God I fail to see how this could be part of the plan.
They say that You’re alive again, but I saw death and ev’ry sin
Reach out to claim their darkest win.
How could this be part of the plan?
If I could only hold your hand,
And touch the scars where nails were driven.
I would need to feel Your side where holy flesh by spear was riven.
Then I’d believe, only then I’d believe
Your cruel death was part of the heavenly plan.
Holy presence, holy face; a vision filling time and space.
Your nearness makes my spirit race. Could this be part of the plan.
I see the wounds that caused the cry, from heaven, ocean, earth, & sky;
Where people watched their Savior die.
Could this be part of the plan?
Reaching out to hold Your hand,
And touch the scars where nails were driven;
Coming near I feel Your side, where holy flesh by spear was riven.
Now I believe. Jesus, now I believe.
Your cruel death was part of a heavenly plan.
I proudly say with blazon cry: "You are my Lord and my God."

After the hymn, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say,

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Please be seated. . . The boundary lines have fallen for us in pleasant places. We are blessed beyond all deserving. Let us express our thanks to God for all that we have received, as we share God's gifts to us with those still in need. 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

"Pastorale in F Major" - 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... We rejoice in the inheritance you have given us, O God, and delight in sharing it with others. You have given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. You have touched our lives with eternity, and brought us indescribable and glorious joy. Bless these gifts and use them for your transformative purposes, we pray. Amen.

The Liturgist will instruct the congregation to "Be seated."

The preacher will say, "Would Matthew DeSeguirant please come to the front?"

THE BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION OF A NEW MEMBER

Presentation

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

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Presentation

Hear the words of our Lord Jesus Christ:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Hear also these words from Holy Scripture:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Obedying the word of our Lord Jesus, and confident of his promises, we baptize those whom God has called.

In baptism God claims us, and seals us to show that we belong to God.

God frees us from sin and death, uniting us with Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection.

By water and the Holy Spirit, we are made members of the church, the body of Christ, and joined to Christ's ministry of love, peace, and justice.

Let us remember with joy our own baptism, as we celebrate this sacrament.

The minister addresses the candidates for baptism:

Matthew, do you desire to be baptized? **I do.**

The minister addresses the congregation:

Do you, as members of the church of Jesus Christ, promise to guide and nurture Matthew by word and deed, with love and prayer, encouraging him to know and follow Christ and to be a faithful member of his church?

The people respond: We do.

Profession of Faith

Through baptism we enter the covenant God has established. Within this covenant God gives us new life, guards us from evil, and nurtures us in love. In embracing that covenant, we choose whom we will serve, by turning from evil and turning to Jesus Christ.

The minister then asks the following questions of the candidate:

As God embraces you within the covenant, I ask you to reject sin, to profess your faith in Christ Jesus, and to confess the faith of the church, the faith in which we baptize.

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? **I do.**

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? **I do.**

Will you be Christ's faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? **I will.**

Affirmation of Faith

With the whole church, let us stand and confess our faith using the words of the Apostles Creed as they are printed in our bulletins. Let us confess the faith in which we baptize:

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. On the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth at 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.

Let us Pray: We give you thanks, Eternal God, for you nourish and sustain all living things. By the baptism of his own death & resurrection, Christ set us free from sin and death, and opened the way to eternal life.

We thank you, O God, for the water of baptism. In it we are buried with Christ in his death. From it we are raised to share in his resurrection, Through it we are reborn by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Send your Spirit to move over this water that it may be a fountain of deliverance and rebirth. Wash away the sin of him who is cleansed by it.

Raise him to new life, and graft him to the body of Christ. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon him, that he may have power to do your will, and continue forever in the risen life of Christ.

To you, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, be all praise, honor, and glory, now and forever. Amen.

The Baptism

The candidate will kneel.

Matthew DeSeguirant, I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer of Dedication

The minister lays hands on the head of the baptized, while saying:

Let us pray: O Lord, uphold Matthew by your Holy Spirit. Give him the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord, the spirit of joy in your presence, both now and forever. Amen.

Matthew DeSeguirant, child of the covenant, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism, and grafted into Christ forever. Amen.

Welcome

Candidates who have been kneeling will stand.

Matthew DeSeguirant has been received into the one holy catholic and apostolic church through baptism. God has made him a member of the household of God, to share with us in the priesthood of Christ. Matthew will join me at the exit of the Sanctuary this morning to give each of you an opportunity to welcome him as the newest newest member of Christ's body here in Magnolia.

The minister and Matthew will return to their seats.

ANTHEM

"Lamb of God" - Twila Paris/Craig Courtney

The Choir

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the fourth chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans, beginning at the thirteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 980 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations; as he had been told, "So shall your descendants be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead because he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "reckoned to him as righteousness." But the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification."

The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation. Thank you for your service.

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

Our sermon text today is taken from the twentieth chapter of John's Gospel, beginning at the nineteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #945 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more 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.”

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Our Inheritance”

I am one of those who thinks Thomas has been given a bad rap. If any one of us had been missing from that first appearance of Jesus to the Disciples in the Upper Room, I dare say Thomas’s doubts would have been ours.

Doubt is a funny thing. It seems most prominent in our lives when our suffering is so great that we can not wrap our pointy little heads around the proposition that God can be both good and great at the same time we are suffering. If he loved us and was the all powerful God we have always believed him to be, then he would stop our suffering. If he doesn’t stop it, then he must not be great or he must not be good, or even worse than these two possibilities, he must not exist at all.

I often fantasize that having a powerful mystical encounter would settle all faith issues once and for all. But for people who have them, it doesn't seem to work that way. Sometimes people come to the mountain, hear the thunder, see the smoke and lightning, and a few months later they are bellyaching about having to camp in the wilderness and whining about how they want to go back to Egypt and slavery for the leeks and onions. Thomas wasn’t the first believer to lose himself in the silence of God, and he won’t be the last. So just maybe... God has his reasons for the silence.

Take the story of Agnes. From the time she was a young girl, Agnes believed. Not just believed - she was on fire. She wanted to do great things for God. She said she wanted to love Jesus as he had never been loved before. She knew Jesus was with her and she had an undeniable sense of him calling her. She wrote in her journal, "My soul at present is in perfect peace and joy." She experienced a union with God that was so deep and so continual that it was to her a rapture. She left her home, became a missionary, gave him everything.

And then God left her, just as he had left Thomas.

At least, that is how it felt to her. Where is my faith? she wondered. Even deep down there is nothing but emptiness and darkness My God, how painful is this unknown pain I have no faith. She tried to pray: "I utter words of community prayers-- and try my utmost to get out of every word the sweetness it has to give. But my prayer of union is not there any longer. I no longer pray."

On the outside she worked, she served, she smiled. But she spoke of her smile as her "mask, a cloak that covers everything."

This inner darkness and dryness and pain over the absence of God continued on, year after year, with one brief respite, for nearly fifty years. Such was the secret pain of Agnes-- better known to most of us as Mother Teresa.

The letters that expressed her inner torment were a secret during her life, and she asked that they be destroyed. But a strange thing has happened. Her willingness to persist in the face of such agonizing doubts brings comfort and strength to people that an inner life of ease and certainty never could. As in her life she was a servant of the poor, so in her anguish she has become a missionary for those who doubt.

Some people, like atheists Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins, see this as Mother Teresa just butting up against the reality that God isn't really there after all. But Mother Teresa didn't reject God, even though she never overcome her pain when God was silent. Rather, in a strange way, it became a part of her.

A wise spiritual counselor told her three things she needed to hear. One was that there was no human remedy for this darkness. (So she should not feel responsible for it.)

Another was that "feeling" the presence of Jesus was not the only or even the primary evidence of his presence. (Jesus himself said by their fruits-not their certainty-you shall know them.) In fact, the very craving for God was a "sure sign" that God was present-though in a hidden way-in her life.

And the third bit of wisdom was that the pain she was going through could be redemptive. Jesus himself had to experience the agony of the absence of God: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And as his suffering was redemptive for us, so Mother Teresa could suffer redemptively by holding on to God in the midst of her darkness.

David Winter had been president of Westmont College for over a quarter of a century. Toward the end of his term, as he was looking forward to retirement, he suffered a disease that over a period of three weeks robbed him of his sight. As he processed up to the graduation platform, he had to hold the arm of another to guide him. **And in his words of greeting to the students and parents, he said, "Never doubt in the darkness what God has shown you in the light."**

This also became Mother Teresa's last, great gift to the world-- and Honest, if Doubting, Thomas as well.

Maybe there is a good reason why God doesn't show up in the sky for a showdown. Perhaps God's goal for the human race is more than just getting people to admit that he exists. Forcing people to believe in the existence of God or the existence of the supernatural does no good. People can believe in the supernatural but still have lives that are moral or spiritual disasters. James put it like this: "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-- and shudder" (James 2:19).

God seems to present himself to us in such a way that people who want to dismiss God will be able to dismiss him. He seems to leave space for them. People who do not want there to be a God will find a way to believe that there is no God. Blaise Pascal said that there is enough light for those who want to see and enough darkness for who do not.

The San Francisco Chronicle ran a cartoon showing two men going door to door sharing their beliefs and handing out tracts and pamphlets. One man standing in front of an open door complains that the pamphlet they have just give him is blank. They answer, "Of course it is.... We're atheists."

What else are we to expect? If there is no God, there is no story. There is nothing to write, no guideline, no indicator. Nothing makes any difference. Do whatever you want to do! The universe is silent.

But we all have this sense, not just that life is hard... not just that we suffer... not just that things are bad... but that things are not the way they're supposed to be. Children are not supposed to grow up with no one caring about them, no one providing for their education and health just because they're the wrong color. Women are not supposed to be abused. Dads are not supposed to die of cancer when they are forty years old and their children are young.

So... where did we get the idea that there is a certain way, a better way... that things are supposed to be?

For example, a woman went to a salon to have her nails manicured. As the beautician began to work, they began to have a good conversation about many subjects. When they eventually touched on God, the beautician said, "I don't believe God exists."

"Why do you say that?" asked Sheryl, who has MS.

"Well, you just have to go out on the street to realize God doesn't exist. Tell me, if God exists, would there be so many sick people? Would there be abandoned children? If God existed, there would be neither suffering nor pain. I can't imagine loving a God who could allow all these things."

Sheryl thought for a moment. She didn't respond because she didn't want to start an argument. The beautician finished her job, and Sheryl left the shop.

Just after she left the beauty shop, she saw a woman in the street with long, stringy, dirty hair. She looked filthy and unkempt. Sheryl turned, entered the beauty shop again, and said to the beautician, "You know what? Beauticians do not exist."

"How can you say that?" asked the surprised beautician. "I am here. I just worked on you. I exist."

"No," Sheryl exclaimed, "beauticians do not exist, because if they did, there would be no people with dirty, long hair and appearing very unkempt like that woman outside!"

"Ah, but beauticians do exist," she answered. "The problem is, people do not come to me."

Exactly!

The main problem with doubt, when doubt gets toxic, is not what it does to us. It is what it keeps us from doing.

If I doubt, I can take my questions to God and ask him, who I can not see or feel, but believe from earlier experience that he does exist, to help my unbelief. And I can remember his promise that we have received and inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for us. I can remember that the promise is ours, by faith, just as it was for Abraham, that we may not receive it in this life, but WE WILL RECEIVE IT!

Thank you Thomas. Thank you Agnes. Thanks be to God for all the saints, living and dead, older even than myself, or younger even than Matthew, who have claimed their inheritance by faith. And who believe, without having seen proof!

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Loving God, you bring hope and comfort to those who weep; encouragement to those who live in fear; and faith to those who live in uncertainty and doubt. You reign supreme in spite of suspicion, destruction, and greed.

Help us to awaken to the assurance of Easter, and to be more attuned to the mercy you bestow. Grant that we may live always confident of your grace, and by it be delivered from our bondage to limits both real and imagined, from principalities and powers that seek to crush us. Let the light of Christ dispel the shadows, and make bright the pathway you would have us walk.

Will You give us that faith that we can deposit in the bank of Your love, so that we may receive the dividends and interest that You so lovingly want us to have. We ask it all in the strong and loving name of Jesus Christ our Savior, 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 dedication, "My Faith Has Found a Resting Place", which has been printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"My Faith Has Found a Resting Place"

My faith has found a resting place, not in device or creed;
I trust the ever living One, His wounds for me shall plead. *Refrain*
I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me.
Enough for me that Jesus saves, this ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him, He'll never cast me out. *Refrain*
My heart is leaning on the Word, the living Word of God,
Salvation by my Savior's name, Salvation through His blood. *Refrain*
My great physician heals the sick, the lost He came to save;
For me His precious blood He shed, for me His life He gave. *Refrain*

*THE BENEDICTION

*THE CHORAL RESPONSE

"Freely, Freely"

Freely, freely, you have received. Freely, freely give.
Go in my name and because you believe, others will know that I live.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis