

Sunday, May 3, 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. The liturgist and pastor will enter together. The Pastor will 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.”

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

"Open Your Hearts" - Kim Shirey

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 Isaiah 55 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Isaiah 55)

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;

You that have no money, come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Seek the Lord while he may be found,

Call upon him while he is near;

Let the wicked forsake their way, and the unrighteous their thoughts;

Let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and abundantly pardon.

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth,

So shall my word not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I intend.

For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace;

The mountains and the hills shall burst into song,

All the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;

Instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;

And it shall be to the Lord for a memorial,

An everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Loving and righteous God, cleanse us today by your word so that the love we share with the world may be untainted by our own prejudices. Prepare us to take advantage of every opportunity to reach out to those different from ourselves, but who have no less need of your redeeming grace. Prune away our fears and failures so that, abiding in you we may be fruitful branches of your church, and reach out to feed a world starving for the love, peace, and joy of Christ. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “The Day of Resurrection”, number 118 in our Hymnals.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“The Day of Resurrection”

The Hymnal #118

*CALL TO CONFESSION

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

Listen again to the promise and challenge of Jesus: If you abide in me and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you... Let us ask for forgiveness and healing so that we may bear the fruits that befit children of the Most High. Let us pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins, pausing at its end for a moment of silent prayer or meditation. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Father of all Creation, we must confess before you our tendency to exclusiveness. Forgive us when we turn away from the needs of others, and excuse ourselves saying we must look after "our own" first. Forgive us for the conditions and restrictions we put upon our associations, for the missed opportunities to reach out to the isolated and lonely, the marginal-ized in our midst. Forgive the spiritual pride that makes assumptions as to who is worthy to belong to the church of Jesus Christ. We are ashamed of such arrogance, and seek the cleansing of our hearts and a new awareness of the breadth & depth of your love. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

God is faithful even when we are not. God loves us and forgives us because of who He is and not because of who we are. We have asked and he has answered with mercy and grace... 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 made right with God, remember to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you; sharing the peace of Christ 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, the preacher 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 begin to leave the front, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We have seen that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. We testify to that faith when we share what we have received to bring others to the knowledge of God. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another as we give gladly and continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will take a seat until the Doxology.

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... We give, gracious God, because we are grateful. Your love has sustained us through many trials and temptations. We are thankful for those who have guided our attempts to understand the scriptures. Your loving judgment has provided the pruning our lives require in order to bear fruit. Accept

the gifts we bring so we may show your grace to others as you have shown it to us and so that we may seek to abide together in your love. Amen.

*THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith as it is expressed in the traditional version 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

The Choir

After the Anthem, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the fifty-sixth chapter of Isaiah, beginning with the third verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #636 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, "The LORD will surely separate me from his people"; and let not the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."

For thus says the LORD: "To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off.

"And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant -- these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Thus says the Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered."

The liturgist will sit down on the Chancel or with the congregation.

The preacher will step into the pulpit & say...

Our gospel lesson for today is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, the eighth chapter, beginning with the twenty-sixth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #955 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road.

And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can'dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.

And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot."

So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this: "As a sheep led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken up from the earth."

And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?"

Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus.

And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?"

And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.

And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Better Than Children”

Who let the riff raff into the church? You know..... those people who just don't belong here.... *THOSE* people..... I heard someone say that they thought it started with Stephen. When he made that speech against the temple in Jerusalem that's what started it. Now he was appointed to wait tables but he thought he had to preach; everybody wants to preach. And that's what started it."

A friend of mine said it was Peter's fault.... one minute everything's fine and the next, he gets ahold of some bad mushrooms has some crazy dream about unclean food, and the next thing you know he's baptizing some Roman general and his whole heathen brood.

Some other nice folks think it's Philip' fault. He went up there and baptized some of those Samaritans. He might just as well have gone to Austin, Texas. Talk about weird. He baptized some of those crazy Samaritans. Those people will eat anything that won't eat them. And you know what they say... when you let Samaritans in, the camel's nose is in the tent.

Of course there's an excellent case to be made for dumping it all on Paul. Running around here claiming this vision, claiming to be an Apostle to the Gentiles. He just takes in everybody, just lets them all in. And look at his churches. Holding their bulletins upside down, don't know an introit from a benediction. He just lets in everybody and that's when it all turned sour as far as I'm concerned. If Paul ever shows up here, he can fellowship with us, he can take the Lord's Supper with us, but he is not to preach. Oh, he can have the benediction or something; he is not to preach.

Luke says that the fault is God's. That God sent the Holy Spirit to push and shove the church. Instead of focusing on what the church is supposed to look like, Luke turns the camera around, and turns its lens on one of the people whose future is at stake. What does it mean to the person standing outside waiting upon the decision of the church. Will he be admitted or not?" He doesn't want to be a leader. He isn't asking the church's blessing for anything other than the meal of grace. He just wants a seat at the Lord's table.

Take Luke's story about the Ethiopian eunuch riding in his chariot from Jerusalem to Gaza. He's an Ethiopian. I don't know if Luke wants us to take that literally or not. Every since the days of Homer, Ethiopia had been a symbol for the end of the world. Ethiopia meant the same thing to them as Timbuktu might to us. We might say, "I don't care if she goes to Timbuktu." That's the way Ethiopia was used. I mean how far out and away and distant can you be?

"He's an Ethiopian." And he's a eunuch. A eunuch is a man who either by accident or by surgery was rendered sexless. Usually such persons found gainful employment with the powerful and wealthy because they were not derailed by their own private interests-- harmless around the harem. No wife, no children, nothing to distract. They never had to be late because the wife was sick and they had to drive the carpool. Josephus wrote, "One nasty thing about Herod is that he had three eunuchs in his palace." Even though, even though the Jewish Scripture was very clear. Deuteronomy 23:1: "The eunuch shall not be permitted in the assembly of the people of God"

"The eunuch shall not be permitted in the assembly of the people of God." Then what in the world does it mean when it says he had been up to Jerusalem to worship?

What kind of man is this who would linger around outside the temple, look over the fence, and ask people, "How was the service? How was the sermon? Were there many people there?" Peeking through knotholes, getting stuff secondhand-- kind of creepy isn't it.

Now I ask you... seriously. Why would anyone continue to knock at a locked door and stand there with bloody knuckles and refuse to go home?

The door is locked. What part of "You are not welcome" does he not understand?

Maybe he's one of those people who thinks if you are rich enough and powerful enough, the rules don't have to apply to you. He is a wealthy man. He has his own Bible. He's in a chariot. He is in the service of Candace, the Queen of the Ethiopians. He's the treasurer of the country. Maybe he thinks the rule doesn't apply to him.

I don't know why he does it. I certainly wish he'd make it easy on himself. He's simply increasing the pain. Linger at the edge of the people of God with that verse staring at him day and night. I mean even if we let you in, you don't fit in--

I heard like one of those people who got into a Presbyterian church right here in this Presbytery--- a former Pentecostal lady who came out of nowhere and went to a Presbyterian church one morning and every time she prayed she didn't bow her head, she looked up as if to stare at the Lord full in the face. And.... didn't keep her arms at her side or folded respectfully in front of her. No, she opened her arms and hands wide as if she was waiting for God to dump a wheelbarrow load of blessing on her.

I heard tell they had a meeting about it after worship. She wanted to join that church... Can you imagine?... That's when someone pointed out that she hadn't been here very long. Her husband had come in with a crew to build the new downtown church addition. She was living in a trailer at the jobsite with him. Someone made a motion: "Members will be admitted to this church only from families who own property in the county." It passed... unanimously.

I was in that area not too long ago. I thought I'd drive by and see the old church building. Sure enough it was still there, nestled back in the pines, shining white, just beautiful. Just like it was twenty years ago when they made their new membership policy-- except now cars and trucks were parked everywhere. And it had a big sign out front: "Barbecue. All you can eat, chicken, ribs, pork."

I said, "Might as well stop in for lunch." Ya'll know I'm a sucker for good ribs. Inside they still had those beautiful gothic sconces hanging on the wall. They still had the old pump organ that one of the kids always had to pump while it was being played in the service. It's still pretty, but now it's just a decoration.

The pews which had been cut from a single cypress tree were around the walls and people sat on them while they waited to get a table; there were a lot of those cheap white plastic-topped folding tables. They had a few pussle gutted good ole' boys, some black folks, and some oriental types, and even some dark skinned middle eastern folks. That old building was chock full of people-- Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, dwellers of Mesopotamia. And I couldn't help but think, "It's a darn good thing that this isn't a church anymore. None of these folks would be welcome. They wouldn't fit in."

So why does this Ethiopian eunuch keep holding on, hanging around, and knocking on a locked door?

You know what he's doing.... You do it yourself; I do it myself. He's flipping the pages of the Bible to find his own name. Everyone in the world wants that. I want to find my name. I want to find a verse that says, "this one's for me". Just a little promise, something. Don't we all do that?

I have a friend whose son, a university student, was killed in a wreck and my friend kept saying it was God's will. I couldn't stand it. You don't argue at a funeral but weeks later when we were talking, I said, "Chris, you can't say that anymore, that it was God's will that he be killed in a car wreck. Don't say that."

He looked at me with level gaze and said, "I will say that." He said, "What alternative do you offer? You'll probably say it was an accident. Now which do I prefer, to believe that God knew my son, that God had something in store for my son, that God had a purpose for my son? Or your theology that says, 'It was an accident.' I'll take mine, than you very much, now leave me alone."

Even in death people want to say, "Ah, there's my name. God knows me."

And so this eunuch is reading in Isaiah and he finds it; he thinks he finds it. It's almost too good to be true. There it says it, Isaiah.

"No longer let the foreigners say surely Lord will separate me from his people. No longer let the eunuch say I am but a dry tree for thus says the Lord God. The days are coming when the eunuch, who hears my voice and obeys my law and keeps covenant, I will give him a place in my house and I will give him a name and it shall be to him as generation and generation and generation of children. Better than sons and daughters it shall be to the eunuch." (Isa. 56:3-5, paraphr.).

And he keeps reading on in Isaiah. "As a lamb that's led to the slaughter, as a sheep before a shearer is dumb, he didn't open his mouth! Who will declare his generation? He was cut off out of the land of living. He had no children; he had no generation. He had no one to remember him. He had no one to carry on his name. He was just cut off, killed without any children. Who's going to declare justice for him?".

And Philip said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" He said, "No, I don't have anybody to help me, but found some good stuff here. Now is the prophet talking about himself or is the prophet talking about someone else?" Philip said, "Let me tell you who that is. That's Jesus."

"You mean he was cut off without any children? He didn't have any other generations and grandchildren and people to keep his name?"

"No, he was cut off from the land of the living."

"Now I'm just an Ethiopian and I don't know how you feel about Ethiopians, but it says here, no longer let the foreigners say surely the Lord will say, 'get out'... I know I'm a eunuch and I know what it says in Deuteronomy but it says in Isaiah, 'No longer let the eunuch say I'm just a dry tree. For I the Lord God will bless you and you will be remembered and it will be better than children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren forever."

"Brother Philip, do you suppose it's possible, even though I'm just an Ethiopian. Even though I'm a eunuch,... do you think it is possible, I be a member of the church?"

And Philip said, "I can think of a hundred people who are going to be upset but, yes. I don't know how this is going to go over back home, but yes. In fact, I'm surprised at hearing myself say this, but yes. Because the fact of the matter is, who am I to say no when it is clear that God has already said yes."

Do we have to put it to a vote? Or may we accept it by acclamation?

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

Eternal God, whose heart is as expansive as the universe itself, we pray for those among us who have been forgotten by those who were supposed to love and care for them; for those who remain unseen by that vast host of us who remain blind to all but our own concerns; for those who yearn for effortless words of friendship.

We pray for those whom we have in any way injured, whether by our malignant intent or our benign neglect. May the power of your love overcome the estrangement between ourselves and those

whom we overlook, neglect, or forget. Reassure us all that you do not forget, and that when our great monuments have fallen, and our accomplishments forgotten, that you have carved our names on the palm of your hand and that you will never forget us, or fail to make us welcome. That you will bless us with that which is better than a name, better than children, a place at your table, where our sins are forgiven and forgotten even as we are remembered and honored as your own beloved children in Christ.

We come to your table, trusting in the comforting words which we have heard, and by which you invite us to your table. Pour out your Spirit upon these common elements that they may become uncommon. Grant that by his body, our bodies may be made clean; that our souls may be washed in his most precious blood; that our wills become so surrendered to you; that we may easily recognize you in whatever guise you may be found, and that others may recognize you in us, enabling us to serve as instruments of your grace, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

(The congregation will sing in unison)

Malotte

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, & the power & the glory, forever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

The Words of Institution

The Distribution of the Elements

The Prayer After Receiving

Strengthen for service, Lord, the hands that have taken holy things. May the ears which have heard your word be deaf to clamor and dispute. May the tongues which have sung your praise be free from deceit. May the eyes which have seen the tokens of your love shine with the light of hope; and may the bodies which have been fed with your body be refreshed with the fullness of your life that we may bring glory to you forever. Amen.

Would all who are able please stand and join in singing our closing hymn, "O Christians, Haste", printed in your bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"O Christians, Haste"

O Christians, haste, your mission high fulfilling,

To tell to all the world that God is light;

that he who made all nations is not willing

one soul should perish, lost in shades of night. *[Refrain]*

Publish glad tidings, tidings of peace, tidings of Jesus, redemption, and release.

Proclaim to ev'ry people, tongue, and nation

That God, in whom we live and move, is love;

Tell how he stooped to save his lost creation

And died on earth that we might live above. *[Refrain]*

Send heralds forth to bear the message glorious.

Give of your wealth to speed them on their way;

Pour out your soul for them in prayer victorious,

And all your spending Jesus will repay. *[Refrain]*

*THE BENEDICTION

*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