

**Morning worship Service from
First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, AR
Fifth Sunday after Easter**

May 6th, 2018

10:45 AM

PRELUDE "Laudate Dominum" - Richard A. Williamson Dr. Elizabeth Davis
After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern & say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 23 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 23)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul.

He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil,

For you are with me and your rod and your staff comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness & mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Almighty and ever-loving God, as we gather together today in Your name, we come with grateful hearts for all You have done and all You are doing in our lives. Thank you for the men and women of faith before us who served as examples of Christian faith. Thank you for the people around us who share our journey of faith. Use this hour of praise, of scripture and of prayer, to prepare us for the future so that we may look ahead with hope, and live out Your purposes and plans in the name of Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. Amen

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "How Great Thou Art", number 467 in our *Hymnal*.

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

HYMN "How Great Thou Art" *The Hymnal #467

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

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace praying together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins and pausing for a moment of silent prayer at its end, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Let us pray...

***PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

(In Unison)

Mighty God, we are often weary, believing we are alone, caught on a treadmill from which we cannot escape. We're running a race, but have lost sight of the finish line and lost hope of reaching it. We have even forgotten the prize that awaits each of us at the end of our race. We have taken our eyes off you, the One who sets our course. Rather than focusing on you, and allowing you to determine our pace and our priorities, we have followed the lead of others in our society who do not share your values, and zig zag back and forth between the newest glittering or glamorous thing that grabs one's attention. Forgive us for our lack of faith and focus. Help us to turn back to you, trusting in your providence, confident in your steadfast love, and assured that you will provide all the strength we need. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

***THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

God's mercy is from everlasting to everlasting. When we confess our sins, God has promised to forgive us. Accept God's gift of forgiveness and give forgiveness when it is asked of you. 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

Forgiven and freed by the grace of God, we may experience the peace of Christ and share it joyfully 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 liturgist will step into pulpit and say...

INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

"Please be seated.... God gave us his very best when he gave us His son on the cross. Let us bring no less than our best to spread that good news 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

"Communion Meditation" - Victor C. Johnson

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*DOXOLOGY

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 pulpit and say...

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... For the unshakable foundation of faith you have given us, and for the precious lives that have built wisely upon that foundation, we give you thanks, O Lord. Accept and bless these gifts that they may be used to build up your church and extend your grace into all the world, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostles' Creed"

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 then sit down.

SPECIAL MUSIC

"Fight the Good Fight"

Joanna Smith, soloist

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from Paul's Letter to the Philippians, the third chapter beginning at the fourth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1023 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from

God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. Brethren, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

The liturgist will return to her seat with her family in the congregation with our thanks for your service.

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

Our second lesson this morning is taken from Paul’s Second Letter to Timothy, the fourth chapter beginning at the fifth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1039 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

“As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. As for me, I am already on the point of being sacrificed; the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Our thanks be to God!

THE SERMON

“Benediction”

Rev. Mike Morgan

This is the season of endings. Just this week, SAU ended another semester, another school year. Such occasions are usually punctuated by the top graduate delivering a “valedictory” address. Such an address is a valediction and is meant to allow one class to say farewell in a memorable way to their professors and to their underclassmen. It is really just a fancy “Goodbye.”

A benediction, on the other hand, usually marks the end of a worship service and really is more than a signal that the service is over and we get to go home. A benediction is a parting of the ways, a recognition that classmates will not be together again in the same way as when they were students. No longer will your friends and classmates be there to comfort you, to study with you, to encourage you as before. Now you are going out to face the world yourself. A benediction invokes a blessing that is intended to remind you that God goes with you. God is there to meet the desires of your heart with his all sufficient grace. It is not just a good bye to old friends.... it is an introduction to your newest and best friend, God himself.

Nobodies like Paul, and like us, need that.

For example, the very different lives of Paul the Apostle and the Emperor Nero overlapped for a short time in the city of Rome. In the seventh decade these two famous men lived in the same city. While Nero’s name was making headlines, Paul’s wasn’t. *60 Minutes* would have wanted to interview Nero. Chuck Todd would have wanted him as a guest on *Meet the Press*. Nero would have been invited to dinner, hosted and toasted, greeted and feted wherever the beautiful people were to be found. Nero was hero.

Paul was zero. You couldn’t get Paul to talk about anything other than Jesus-- as if he were God. Paul was a condemned man, just waiting for his date on the chopping block in Rome. Even most of his former friends had deserted him. If you asked anyone in Rome in 65 A.D., “Who will make the greatest impact on the world, Nero or Paul?” everyone would pick Nero. Nero was married to Poppaea, a blonde, head-turning beauty who bathed in donkey milk. Four hundred donkeys were kept on hand for just that. She would be dried by swan feathers and massaged with crocodile mucous. Nero liked soft skin, and what Nero wanted, Nero got.

At age 25, Nero declared himself to be God and erected a 120 foot tall statue of himself.

Paul, on the other hand, had known his share of suffering. Scars spread across his back like a windshield cracks. Old wounds stiffened his joints. His own account of his hardships included floggings, lashings, beatings with rods, pelting with stones, shipwrecks, dangers from rivers and bandits and Jews and Gentiles, danger in the city and in the country, danger at sea and from false believers. He knew hard

labor, lack of sleep, hunger, thirst, cold and nakedness (2 Cor. 11:23-29).

It's a wonder that he could move at all, but move he did. From Corinth to Ephesus, from Thessalonica to Colossae, he left his footprints all over the known world of his day.

When he wasn't walking he was writing. He wrote letters to the church in Rome and Corinth and Galatia and Ephesus and Philippi. He wrote to Titus and he wrote to Timothy. Letters that continue to bless. And as Paul writes to the Philippians and to Timothy for the last time, one can not escape the conclusion that he has no regrets. He is awaiting death, but with it comes a second face to face meeting with his Lord. He is as happy in jail as he had ever been on the outside. He is as happy dying for Jesus as he was to live for Jesus. Anyone knowing Paul and forced to describe him with one word would use the word -- CONTENT!

How did Paul survive all the stonings, whippings, prisons, betrayals, abandonment? More to the point, how are you supposed to do it? Maybe you have been rejected by others because of your belief in Jesus Christ. Some of your family thinks you're crazy. Maybe you're going to be caught out in one of those life changing storms of life-- financial storms, or marital storms, ethical storms. All of Christ's followers face challenges, whether Paul or us, and in his benediction, he shares the secret of his strength.

What is his secret? Listen to this from 2 Timothy 1:8-12: "Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him."

Paul anchored his life to a hope out of this world.

Paul entrusted his life into the hands of God.

We can identify with Paul because many times we feel like nothing in life is going right.

Paul ended his life very well; Nero did not. 2 Timothy 4:6-8

Paul's new life began on the Damascus road and ended on a chopping block in a prison cell in Rome.

Nero at the age of 29 was lonely and paranoid; his second wife killed his first wife and Nero kicked his pregnant second wife to death. Four years after Paul's death, Nero himself committed suicide. As it turned out, Nero was no hero.

But the little nobody waiting for death in a Roman jail still impacts us to this day.

In the lower story there is chaos, confusion, struggles, sickness, and imprisonments. Sometimes we feel like that is all there is. The Christian realizes that above all this there is an upper story; that God has an eternal plan that will continue long after after this version of earth has passed away. We may not understand it, but like Paul, we can say that this is for part of God's plan and that it is all for God's glory. Ultimately it is going to work out for good. That's why we do not despair; we don't give up; we hang in there; we hold on.

Maybe you're laboring away in relative anonymity, doing your thing for the glory of God. You're loving your kids. Paying your bills. Teaching first graders. Manning the fire station. Showing up at work. Hanging in there with a grumpy spouse. Maybe you are just taking it one day-- or even one minute at a time.

The real change makers are those who are quietly working under the radar, not those who are walking the red carpet. They are touching lives and making a difference, one life at a time. So don't be discouraged just because most of us look so ordinary.... or even when the church looks terribly ordinary-- or even plug ugly.

When you face struggles because of your faith, remember Paul. He anchored himself to a purpose that was higher and greater than his life.

“I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.”

There are many fights you can fight, but Paul trained himself for the **good** fight. His fight did not end at death. His writings have encouraged, exhorted, and educated followers of Christ till today and for all the tomorrows to come. So can you. “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet...” (Hebrews 12:12-13)

The Book of Acts continues It is God’s story and our Story as well...

Fight the good fight. And like Paul, finish the race well.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD’S PRAYER

Dear Lord, wake us up this morning. Give us eyes that see & hearts that burn. Give us souls that yearn to serve, & to tell the world that our Lord is alive. We know that He is alive because He has raised us up from the deadness of our sin & given us new life in Him. We ask you to be powerfully present in all our times of trial, dissolving our doubts and strengthening our faith. Be with us when we are feeling overwhelmed by stress and frustrated by events beyond our control. Bless us when we feel lonely and lost, when we are scared, when weakness overtakes us. Lead us to faith beyond sight, trust beyond doubt, and deeds beyond words, that we may live as your forgiven and forgiving children.

Lord, we are indeed unworthy to come into this holy space, but we need and long for your help and grace. Therefore, we come to you, trusting only in the comforting words which we have heard, 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, 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; & 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.

The preacher will say, “Would those going to Cameroon with the delegation from this church please come forward?”

COMMISSIONING SERVICE

Hear the command that our Lord has given:

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘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.’”

Friends, this group of Christians is being commissioned to coordinate our efforts here with those of the Betannia Parish to equip a clinic, provide school books, repair water wells, and build friendships and faith in our members and the members of the Betannia Parish. I offer these individuals to be commissioned as our ambassadors to the Cameroon church and to participate on our behalf in ministry with the people there.

You have been called by Christ through the voice of this congregation to serve as our ambassadors and the ambassadors of Christ. You have worked hard to make this day possible and to prepare yourself for this mission to our Christian brothers and sisters in Nkom.

Are you willing to be installed as our ambassador; to show God’s love and concern for one another and for our sisters and brothers in Nkom?

Those to be Commissioned: I am.

Do you welcome this responsibility because you are determined to follow the Lord Jesus, to love

neighbors, and to work for the reconciling of the world?

Those to be Commissioned: I do.

Will you serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love, relying on God's mercy and rejoicing in his promises through Jesus Christ our Lord?

Those to be Commissioned: I will.

Then the Minister will face the congregation, and say:

Do we, the members of the First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia accept these individuals as chosen of God to serve as our ambassadors to the Betannia Parish?

The congregation: We do.

The Minister will then say:

Let us pray... God of Grace, who called us to a common ministry as ambassadors of Christ, trusting us with the message of reconciliation: give courage and discipline to these your servants as they seek to strengthen the bridge being built by you between ourselves and your children in Cameroon. Lead them, O God, that together they may by their words and deeds demonstrate your love and peace to all they meet as they travel **and** as they worship. Watch over them and protect them as they go forth in your name, and return them safely to us to share their experiences of your ability to break down barriers even as you build up your kingdom on earth; through Jesus Christ, the Lord of all. Amen.

The Minister will then face the eight installees and say:

You are now installed as ambassadors to the church in Nkom on behalf of this congregation. Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving Him alone the glory. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

Come to this sacred table, not because you must, but because you may; come to testify not that you are righteous, but that you sincerely love our Lord Jesus Christ, and desire to be his true disciples; come not because you are strong, but because you are weak; not because you have any claim on the grace of God, but because in your frailty and sin you stand in constant need of his mercy and help; come, not to express an opinion, but to seek his presence and pray for his Spirit.

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.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Blessed Assurance", hymn #341 in our *Hymnal*.

*HYMN

"Blessed Assurance"

The Hymnal #341

THE BLESSING

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

*CONGREGATION RESPONSE

"Go, My Children, Fed and Nourished"

Go, my children, fed and nourished, closer to me; Grow in love and love by serving, joyful and free.

Here my Spirit's power filled you, Here His tender comfort stilled you;

Go, my children, fed and nourished, joyful and free.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis