

*SILENT CONFESSION (pause for about 30 seconds of silence)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God's mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation. He has helped his servants, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors. The Lord is quick to forgive us and sent his only Son not to condemn, but to save us. 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

God, through Christ, has reconciled us to himself and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. Let us answer his call to become ambassadors for Christ, as we share 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 liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

"Please be seated. At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward to the front pew for a message from the Lord prepared just for them by Ms. Karen."

The liturgist will take a seat until after the handbells.

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.***

RECOGNITION OF GRADUATES

Iris Kon and Charlie Taylor

Invite Iris and Charlie to come forward.

Friends, this is a wonderful day when we as the family of God are met to recognize the accomplishments of two fine young men, that we have watched grow and mature in stature and in favor with God. We are delighted that they have reached a graduation milestone with honor and distinction. Charlie has just graduated from Magnolia High School and will be headed off to the University of Arkansas for college. Charlie was my first confirmation class-- the whole class-- the first year I was here. Iris has just graduated from medical school and will be off to Chicago for a postgraduate fellowship and training. And we are so very proud of both of you.

But this is also a lousy day. Because Charlie is leaving here for Fayetteville and Iris is leaving for Chicago. None of us will be able to be there to guide you or to help you. But know that wherever you go, you do not go alone. You cannot escape God's presence, you can never run beyond the capacity of God's love to keep you safe and lead you home.

In recognition of your accomplishments, we have a graduation gift for each of you. And in recognition of your place in this family of faith, we would also like to offer you our prayers of blessing for a bright and glorious future.

Let us pray... Lord, what a glorious day this is! this is. We offer our prayers for these two outstanding young men who still live on the boundary between now and not yet. We ask that you will help them to sort out their feelings, the what if's and the why not's, the grief and the gladness.

Lead them into the mystery of this time and help them embrace it; teach them the power of this thin place where heaven and earth meet. Guide them into an understanding that in the passing of the old something new is being created. Make this day one of grace and amazement, where surface gives way to depth, and they know your power and the unlimited possibilities contained within it.

Go with them, Father, when they leave this place. Grant them the gift of faith that will illumine every season of hardship and darkness. Grant them a love for Your Word, a heart for prayer, a song of

praise, and a sensitive ear to your Spirit, for they will encounter many crossroads in life; not just crossroads of career – but much more importantly crossroads of character.

Goad them into tomorrow, guide them when they're lost, grab them with your strong hand when they're about to fall off the precipice of wrong choice, and grant them your peace so they may go confidently on this footsore and sacred journey of their lives.

All Glory to you in heaven and on earth. Father, Son & Holy Spirit. One God, now & forever.
Amen.

As the graduates leave the front, the Liturgist will step to the lectern & say,
INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We need not be poor to be grateful for God's bounty, nor do we have to be rich before we can share. Everyone can know the blessing of a generous spirit. You are invited to give as God has blessed you as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings.

Take your seat for the offertory.

THE OFFERTORY "Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness" - Donald Busarow 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 pulpit and say...

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray. . . For the precious breath of life, for the wonder of children, for prophets among us, for all the glory of creation round about us, and for your presence which is always with us, O God, we give you thanks and praise. May our zeal for faithful witness be expressed through these offerings and in our daily lives. Accept the gifts we bring and follow them with your blessing that they may bring glory to Christ and new life to your people. Amen.

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...

*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.

The liturgist will invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and then take his seat.

SPECIAL MUSIC

“ “ -

Dr. David DeSeguirant, tenor

As the choir sits down, the liturgist will step to the lectern & say...

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the seventeenth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, beginning with the twenty-fourth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #965 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the Word of God. . . .

"The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything. And he made from one every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him. Yet he is not far from each one of us, for `In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your poets have said, `For we are indeed his offspring.'"

The liturgist will return to his seat . When the liturgist finishes, the preacher will step into the

pulpit & say...

Our Gospel lesson for this morning is taken from the Seventh Chapter of Luke, beginning at the eleventh verse. You can find the passage on page 896 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God. . . .

“Soon afterward he went to a city called Na'in, and his disciples and a great crowd went with him. As he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, a man who had died was being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow; and a large crowd from the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

And he came and touched the bier, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." And the dead man sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother. Fear seized them all; and they glorified God, saying, "A great prophet has arisen among us!" and "God has visited his people!"

And this report concerning him spread through the whole of Judea & all the surrounding country.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Our thanks be to God!

THE SERMON

“God Has Visited Us”

Back in the 1980's, a wealthy member of the Disciples of Christ read a report written by that denomination's board of ministry that revealed that an alarming number of the clergy were leaving the ministry-- not because they were poorly paid or because the stress of their pastorates was exacting too high a price on their physical and mental well-being-- but because they were simply losing their faith and their sense of call.

When this Oklahoma philanthropist read the report, he decided all by himself that something had to be done and he hit upon the idea of establishment of a spiritual retreat center in the holy Lands, so that ministers of his denomination could go, and walk where Jesus walked, and draw close to their Savior once more. He hired one of the Disciples' leading experts to design and implement the program. He and his expert then met with the Ministry Board to explain their idea and get the Board's blessing. The expert laid it all out, the good and the bad. He acknowledged that not every one of the at-risk pastors who went through the program would find what they hoped for in renewed faith, purpose, and commitment. In fact, he went on, as many as half of them would not.

One of the Board members then pointed out that the transportation costs to the Middle East and the time away from their churches, would make their program a very costly venture. He even suggested that if they instead set the program up at their existing retreat center in Texas, they could send twice as many preachers each year.

The old oil man who's inspiration began the discussion, was disgusted. “Gentlemen, the whole point is to get them close to their Savior, to let them walk in His steps. You can only do that in Israel and the surrounding area. The place is important! Besides,“ he continued, “everybody knows that if you're looking for God, you don't go to Texas.”

The old man was right. Maybe not about Texas, but about place being important.

But if someone came to you and asked you, “Where can I find God?”, what would you say? How would you answer their question?

You might say, and you would be right as far as it goes, that God is everywhere. There is no place that God is not. But you know that doesn't really an answer to what they are asking.

I've heard hunters, and golfers, and fishermen.... hikers, and campers, and climbers... All tell me that they can worship anywhere. And I said, “You're right. But DO you?”

“Well, to be honest, no., but it's a nice thing to say.”

Everybody needs a place.... a CERTAIN place.... people of God have to have a place.

When it was time for King Solomon to dedicate the magnificent temple that he had built to the glory of God for the worship of His people, Solomon prayed, “God, we know that you don't need this. The heavens and the earth that you created are too small to hold you, much less this building that we

have built. But WE need it God. We need a place to come and worship you.”

In Acts, Dr. Luke writes, “In him we live & move & have our being.”

As a young Boy Scout attending Howard Glick’s God and Country Award at the synagogue in Texarkana, I heard Rabbi Joseph Levine, their Rabbi for many years say, “My favorite name for the Holy One, blessed be He, is The Place.”

So PLACE is important in our search for God.

Jesus enters the little, otherwise insignificant, town of Nain. He has a large excited throng following him, waiting for his next teaching or his next miracle. Suddenly they turn a corner, and run right into another crowd of folks, this one somber and grief stricken. If you go to Nain today, there are Franciscans who will show you what they believe to be the widow’s house. They will lead you to the very spot upon which Jesus stood and touched the casket and said, “Young man, I say to you, arise.” They will even show you the place in the cemetery where the young man was supposed to be buried. Truth is, they probably don’t have a clue after almost 2000 years. But what is important to them-- and to us-- is that Jesus WAS there. Because he was there, he could look at the woman weeping uncontrollably, and tell her to quit crying. He could touch the casket and raise her hopes along with her dead son. And all the people looking on would exclaim, “God is with us!”

And this is where it might be helpful for us to stop and answer the question, “Of all the Gospel writers, why is Luke the only one to include this story of the incident in Nain. To answer the question scholars usually look for key words or details that appear in this story and nowhere else. And when you look at this one, you find just such a detail.

I think that what struck Luke about this story was that exclamation-- “God has visited his people!”

The Greek phrase found here is only found in the New Testament here-- in Luke. In Nain.

Elsewhere we find it used only twice-- both in the Book of Job. After Job has lost his land, his crops, his livestock, his wealth, his children, his health. After he has been sitting on an ash heap in unrelenting pain from the boils that cover every inch of his body and he has listened to his wife nag him and tell him to curse God and die, and after he has heard his 4 visitors tell him that he is a terrible sinner or God wouldn’t have done this to him-- after all that..... emaciated and in agony, Job says simply, “God I remember when you visited me in my tent.”

And a little later he adds, “Your visit was what kept me alive.”

He remembered. “God, I remembered when you visited me. God, the memory of those visits is what kept me alive.”

The first Sunday I was in Austin after my first week in seminary, with my wife and children back in Texarkana, and I unsure of just what the future held, questioning my call, challenging God to give me a sign, needing to know that I had understood and that this was what I was called to do, and that God had not abandoned me. I had just heard a silly sermon about Jesus’ healing of a blind man with a touch. The preacher had reduced the message down to an inane, “reach out and hug someone today”. I was empty. I was alone. I was where every one of us finds themselves from time to time. I wanted to know, “Where can I find God? Have I lost Him forever?”

And then we got to the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and the table was uncovered revealing Jesus’ timeless command, “Do this in remembrance of me.” Then the minister spoke the same old words I had heard a thousand times before but which seemed to take on a whole new level of meaning, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

And in the blink of an eye, I was home. I knew that my whole life was bound up in God. It was in Him that I did live, and move, and have my being. I knew that there was No place in heaven or earth that I could flee from His presence. I knew that God had visited me, and the memory of that visit, has sustained me through other dark nights of the soul since.

Have you had such a visit from God? I suspect you have. Don’t let its memory get away. Press it like a rose between the pages of your mind. Write it on the tablets of your heart. Keep it fresh. Take it

out from time to time . Feel it. Saturate your senses with its fragrance. The time, The place. Keep it.

Because days will come when your soul will pass through dry and waterless places, in a wilderness far from your home, and you will say, "I remember when you visited me, and that memory will sustain me until I times are better, or until I am with you forever."

When someone asks you, "Where is God?", now you can tell them....

"REMEMBER."

THE PASTORAL PRAYER AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

God of heaven and earth, in whom we live and move and have our being, hear the deep longings of our hearts and set our thoughts upon You, present with us here and now, and forever-- regardless of where we may find ourselves. Before our lives took form we were yours. After our lives are forgotten we will still be yours.

You have forever bound our fragile lives to you; help us not to be afraid. You who are the dreadful silence and the voice every soul yearns to hear, who alone knows what we have been and what we will become, go with us through our uncertain pilgrimage from birth to death and beyond, and let us never forget you and your past mercies, Make us grateful that when we in our sinfulness do forget you, you will not forget us.

This world is a strange place, O God-- full of hope, yet shattered again and again with disappointment; dancing with joy, yet limping with sorrow. Make it the garden of your constant presence, and make us fit to kneel on Holy Ground in your Presence.

Send your Holy Spirit upon us, we pray, that the bread we break and the cup we bless may be to us the communion of the body and blood of Christ. Grant that, being joined together in him, we may attain to the unity of the faith and grow up in all things into Christ, our Lord.

And as this grain has been gathered from many fields into one loaf, and these grapes from many hills into one cup, grant that your church may soon be gathered from the ends of the earth and made one in the kingdom of Him 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.

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

God knows that we are sinners. Do not be concerned if you feel unworthy to receive His gift. He makes ALL things new. That work of transformation begins here and now. It is for us that he gave his body and his blood that we might be fed upon the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation. Allow him to wrap you in his righteousness, to hide your sins beneath his own perfection, and then come. Come to eat your fill and drink deeply of his pardon, for this is his feast and you are invited, not because you are worthy, but because he loves you.

The Words of Institution

On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord took bread, and after he had give thanks, he broke it & gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In like fashion after they had eaten, he took the cup. After he had given thanks he gave it to his disciples saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink ye all of it."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again in final victory.

The Distribution of the Elements

The Prayer After Receiving

Let us pray... Lord Jesus, thank you for filling us with joy and strengthening us for the tasks ahead through the meal we have shared at your table. Having received a foretaste of the banquet we will

share in your kingdom, lead us to acknowledge the awesome debt of love we owe by speaking truth in love, by joyfully serving others in your name, and by building bridges to restore the unity of your body on earth, the church. Through this priceless gift of your body and blood, may we remember, always remember, that you ARE with us. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our closing hymn, "Abide with Me", #543 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Abide With Me"

The Hymnal #543

*THE BLESSING

*THE CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

Psalm 139

Tune: Londonderry Air (O Danny Boy)

O Lord you know my laughing and my weeping.

You see my thoughts and deeds from every side.

Before my birth, my life was in your keeping.

I can't escape, no matter where I hide.

For if I flee from you, through joy or sorrow,

To heaven or hell, I find you waiting there;

Or ride the wings of morning till tomorrow,

Yes, even there, yes even there, I'm in your care.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis