

**Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia
Sunday, June 11th, 2017**

PRELUDE

Ms. Sharon Ard

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 Psalm 100 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 100)

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.

Serve the Lord with gladness.

Come into his presence with singing.

Know ye that the Lord he is God;

It is he that made us, and not we ourselves;

We are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise:

Be thankful unto him, and bless his name.

For the Lord is good; his mercy is everlasting;

And his truth endures to all generations.

Let us worship God beginning by with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Ever creating God, create in us an openness to your word, for we need desperately to hear a word of hope amid our confusion, a strong word bringing order to the chaos around us. Continue the work in us which you began in Creation-- breathing over our troubled waters, speaking a word in the darkness, bringing things to be out of things that were nothing. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “How Great Thou Art”, #467 in our hymnals.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“How Great Thou Art”

The Hymnal #467

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

At the close of the sixth day of creation, God looked out upon us and pronounced us good. Yet how we have sullied and dishonored the image of God since then. God makes old things new and can cleanse us and restore us so that His glory may be revealed in us once more. Let us confess our sins before God and one another and pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Eternal Father, how easy it is for us to excuse our failures by saying, “I’m only human.” In doing so, we seem to have forgotten that Christ himself was human and that you have made us only a little lower than yourself. You have poured out your gifts upon us, both spiritual and physical, in amazing abundance, yet we fail to use them for the benefit of anyone other than ourselves. You have called us to a great a noble mission in the service of Christ, and yet we too often fail to pursue anything other than our own comfort and interests. Remind us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and deliver us from the temptation to excuse our faults by accusing you of failing to equip us. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

In Christ, God has made us new creations. Our sin is forgiven, and we are, even now, being formed into the image of the Christ whose name we bear. 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 reconciled to the Father through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's 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 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.*

The preacher will step to the pulpit and say, "I would invite all who are able to stand and join in singing the hymn "Morning Has Broken", #469 in our Hymnals.

***HYMN OF PREPARATION**

"Morning Has Broken"

The Hymnal #469

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

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

What shall we return to God for all the bounty of the universe over which we have been given dominion? Let us give as generously as we are able and continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.

THE OFFERTORY

Ms. Sharon Ard

***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... Giver of every good and perfect gift, receive these gifts we bring as symbols of our desire to participate in your work of creation, redemption, and transformation. Use them to push back darkness and despair, and to bring order where there is now only confusion. Accept these gifts and we who bring them that the hungry may be fed, the sick relieved of their suffering, and the oppressed set free, all through Christ our Lord, Amen.

THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

"The Apostle's Creed"

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

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick 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.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Dr. David DeSeguirant, tenor

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our gospel reading this morning is taken from the second chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, beginning at the fifth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1044

in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet."

"Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one."

*The liturgist will take a seat, on the Chancel or with
the congregation, with our gratitude for your service.*

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The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our Sermon text for this morning is found in the Eighth Psalm, which you can find on page 467 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God....

"O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your Name in all the earth!

Out of the mouths of infants and children

your majesty is praised above the heavens.

You have set up a stronghold against your adversaries,
to quell the enemy and the avenger.

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars you have set in their courses,

What is man that you should be mindful of him?

the son of man that you should seek him out?

You have made him but little lower than the angels;

you adorn him with glory and honor;

You give him mastery over the works of your hands;

you put all things under his feet:

All sheep and oxen, even the wild beasts of the field,

The birds of the air, the fish of the sea,

and whatsoever walks in the paths of the sea.

O Lord our Lord, how majestic is your Name in all the earth!

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"The Greatest Miracle"

Last week, Lance Jones shared with you the story that led to his sermon being entitled, "A Church for Prostitutes"-- a sermon title which, by the way, has led to a flood of inquiries about this church and requests for a list of "fellowship activities and opportunities".... I'll take that up with Lance later....

But today, I thought it might make a good follow up to share with you the story of a wedding I performed for a former inmate of the Stiles Maximum Security Correctional Facility in Beaumont, Texas. out of all the many weddings in which I have played a part, this one was, for this naive little Presbyterian boy, the one to remember forever.

Bernie had approached me at one of our Friday evening bible studies shortly before his release. He had no connection to our church, only to me through our Friday night studies in the Stiles Chapel over the previous 5 years. He asked me if I would do the wedding service for himself and his fiance. Since his life-style prior to his unfortunate incarceration had precluded the establishment of any long term ecclesiastical relationship, I agreed and gave him the church phone number and address so his fiance could contact me and go over the details. A little over two weeks later, I was engrossed on a Monday afternoon with planning worship, when my secretary, Sheila, informed me that there was someone there to see me.

I stepped to the door to greet my visitor and found a woman in her mid-thirties dressed shoulder to shoes in black leather and metal studs. She had safety pins and rings in places I had never seen before. She was every bit of 5' and 14" tall, with red tipped, spiky hair and arms with more ink on them than a Rand McNally Road Atlas. Her arms and thighs looked like they belonged to a Dallas Cowboy linebacker. "Hi, I'm Frances," she introduced herself, "Bernie tells me you've agreed to do the wedding for us. It's just gonna be a little thing-- a few friends and family in my backyard." Then she went on to fill me in on the rest of the details. I talked to her a little bit about marriage, and she left."

When I showed up on the day of the ceremony, dozens of 'choppers' were parked in the front yard. The friends of the bride and groom were typically men with Fu Manchus and wore black leather jackets topped with German-style helmets with spikes on top. a lot of the women with them looked like retired Las Vegas showgirls and the rest looked like extras from the movie, *Kinky Boots*. As the guests arrived, people and ice chests flowed into the backyard as if they were all riding the crest of a giant tidal wave. The men were loaded down with cases of beer, and the ladies with plate after plate of food.

Inside I was greeted by heavy-metal music and a haze of cigarette smoke. A woman noticed that I was the only one wearing a suit and screamed over the music, 'You must be the pastor. Take a seat and we'll start in a minute!' I looked around for a chair, avoiding the couple that was making out on the swing that hung from an overhanging limb. Soon after I sat down, the best man flopped down onto an ice chest next to me and passed out.

"Forty minutes and six-pack or so later, the bride's sister called everyone to take their places. A few guys propped the best man up against the wall and someone hit the tape player – Led Zeppelin's, 'Misty Mountain Hop'. As the bride walked out, the guys hollered and whistled to one another. The lace of the wedding dress covered her massive arms, but couldn't hide the tattoos that stretched from her wrists to her shoulders. We moved quickly through the promises and rings and no sooner had I pronounced the couple husband and wife, then someone shouted, 'Let's party!'

Within seconds, everyone swarmed the couple with smiles and hugs and kisses. I waited my turn in line to congratulate them and then explained that I needed to leave. But the father of the bride overheard me, grabbed my arm and yelled, 'Let's make a toast!' and had someone hand out dixie cups of wine from a box.

"The bride said, 'I want to make a toast myself. I want to toast you guys. You are just like family to me.' She looked over at her maid of honor and said, 'Jackie, you are just like a sister.'

"Jackie immediately stopped her and said, 'No, you've always been like a sister to me. Do you remember when I lost my baby three years ago? I wouldn't have made it without you.' Then she turned to the group and said, 'Or without all of you. I wanted to die. You gave me a reason to live.'

"The bride continued, 'Richard, when my brother passed away, you were there for me. You were driving a rig cross-country at the time, but you still came over every weekend.'

"Someone interrupted her. 'You've been there for us too. When I lost my job, you brought groceries over to my house and bought school clothes for my kids. I'll never forget that.'

And the forgotten man in all of the, the groom Bernie, chimed in, "I owe all of ya'll big time. When I got sent up, ya'll didn't forget me. You wrote me regular, and visited me every chance you got. You looked after Frankie, here, so I never had to worry about her being OK. I never really had a family till I had ya'll. You kept me alive in that place. I'll never forget you."

This went on for about ten minutes. People shared stories of friends in the group who helped them buy cars or fix their bikes so they could get to work, who watched their children when they were in a pinch. One man told how two guys in the room picked him up from jail and let him live with them until he was able to afford his own place. After everyone finished, the bride looked around the room, lifted her beer and said, 'To friends.'

I looked around the room and thought, "This is like church!"

I guess you just never know when or where you might encounter the image of God, even in the unlikeliest of people, in some of the strangest places, Then I remembered today's Scripture reading, "When I

look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.”

What an amazing thing to say. It’s hard for me to believe that the Psalmist is talking about one such as me with such lofty words. And it is really hard for me to believe that the Psalmist is talking about some other people I have encountered from time to time.

Him? A little lower than God? You can’t be serious! But that is exactly what our text says. Of course, we don’t often act like it, often seeming to do everything we can to deny it. . As Fred Craddock pointed out, “You take the expression, ‘You have made us but little lower than God.’ And then hold it up beside the daily newspaper and it doesn’t seem to fit. One mother leaves her a baby in a dumpster? A father tries to drown his two infant sons in the bathtub so their mother won’t get them in the divorce. Hit a pedestrian and didn’t even stop? Took people’s money that was supposed to buy Chemotherapy drugs, and gave them bags of plain IV Saline instead? It doesn’t seem to fit.”

But then.... I don’t have to read the newspaper. I only need look in the mirror. This is made a little less than God? This, with all my shortcomings, missteps, impatience, anger, and so many failed efforts to be the person God has called me to be? Surely the Psalmist can’t be talking about me. And yet, once in a while, not very often, but just often enough to keep me from despair, my phone rings and on the other end I hear... “Mike, when Mom called and told me Dad had died I was just lost...scrambling for something to hold onto. Then I remembered something you once said in a sermon, and I found a way to get through.”

Really...*something I said?* ? ? ? You just never know. Just never when and in whom the image of God might suddenly appear; when we might actually encounter each other as beings created just a little lower than God. In church? Even at a biker wedding? In you...in me? You just never know.

The Psalmist wonders why God bothers to pay any attention to us. After all, as we read in a later Psalm, we are like grass in the field – here one day and gone the next. Our time here is so brief. It is true of everything we do. And yet, when God made the duck, God said, ‘That’s good!’ And when God made the elephant, God chuckled and said, ‘That’s good!’ When God made the redwood tree, God said, ‘That’s good.’ When God made the rainbow trout, God said, “That’s very good.” And so on with all of creation. But it wasn’t enough. So finally God said, ‘I’m going to make something more like me, something in my image. I’m going to make something so that when others look at it they will say, ‘I think God must look a lot like that.’” And so God made me and God made you. If only we could see what God sees!

In Graham Greene’s novel, *The Power and the Glory*, the whiskey priest, having been pursued by his country’s government intent on destroying the church, is captured and condemned to die. He finds himself spending that last night awaiting his fate in a filthy prison cell, surrounded by the dregs of humanity – drunks, cheats, thieving scoundrels and vicious killers. But in that moment he sees none of this. All he sees around him is the broken and battered body of Jesus. And Greene writes, “At the center of his own faith there always stood the convincing mystery...that we were made in God’s image; and something resembling God dangles from every cross.”

And it is found in every prison, lurks under every grimy face, attends every biker wedding, and even every Sunday worship at The First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas.

The takeaway from today is a reminder of the message first whispered in your ear by your Creator at your birth, and then sullied, and stained, and defaced by decades of-- let’s not call them mistakes-- think of it as experiential learning. But none of those hard knocks can destroy the great underlying truth about you-- **You are the Greatest Miracle in the World!**

Of all God’s creatures, in all of God’s glorious creation, you alone were created in His image. There is nobility and beauty and grace found in you that is found no where else in the universe.

You are more than a human being, you are a human becoming.

You are capable of great wonders. Your potential is unlimited. Who else, among all God’s creatures, has mastered fire? Who else, among His creatures, has conquered gravity, has pierced the heavens, has conquered disease and pestilence and drought?

Do not excuse your mistakes by reminding the world that you are only human. Aspire to greatness, glory in the fact that of all my creatures, you are the very best of them all and only you were designed to bear my image. **You are God's Greatest Miracle!**

Never demean yourself again! Never settle for the crumbs of life!

Never hide your talents, from this day on!

You have been born again ... but just as before, you can choose failure and despair or success and happiness. The choice is yours. The choice is exclusively yours. Your Father can only watch, as before . . . in pride ... or sorrow.

Reach out, grasp your Heavenly Father's hand, and stand straight.

Let Him remove the grave clothes that have bound you. This day you have been notified.

YOU ARE THE GREATEST MIRACLE IN THE WORLD!

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me?...

Our Father, we come before you this day acknowledging that you are Lord of all. You are the one who made the first decision to initiate creation, to speak the first word that would set in motion the vibrations that brought into being what first existed only in your mind and heart. In your own perfect time, you brought us into being, and again, at the right time, you redeemed us and breathed into us your Spirit.

Help us to remember that we are more than recipients, that we have much good to share with others. Remind us always that we have been called to share and serve in your ongoing work of creation and redemption until everything that is, everything you have declared good, becomes more than good, made perfect in Christ. Remind us of our place in creation, that you have made us only a little lower than yourself, and that we have everything we need to accomplish what you intend. Deliver us from excusing our inaction and inattention to your will to our being human. Never let us forget that we can count on you to protect us, to provide for us, and to point us always in the way that we should go, through Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray saying...

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim", hymn #477 in our hymnals.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION "Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim" *The Hymnal #477*

*THE BENEDICTION

You go nowhere by accident. Wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. He has a purpose in your being there. Christ who dwells in you has something He wants to do through you where you are. Believe this and go in His grace and love and power. Amen.

*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

Ms. Sharon Ard