

Sunday, July 19th, 2015

PRELUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

*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 65 and printed in our bulletins?”

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Isaiah 65)

Thus says the Lord, “I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;

**The former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.**

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;

**For I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.**

I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;

**No more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.**

Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

**The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,**

The lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust!

**They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Almighty and Everlasting God, shine your light into our lives and expose our fears. Bring us to the light of living hope and open us to your resurrection power that knows no boundaries. Through a fresh hearing of your Word and the power of your Spirit, inspire us 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 trust the promises you have made for our future. We thank you for the glorious future that we cannot see, but that we believe you will guide us through. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Morning Has Broken”, number 469 in our Hymnals.

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

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Morning Has Broken”

*The Hymnal #469*

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

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

God created us as perfect beings and then witnessed our disobedience that violated that intent. Still, he makes all things new, including those of us who are willing to admit our faults and seek his forgiveness. With contrite and humble hearts, let us come before His throne of grace and confess our sins 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

Lord of our living and dying, you see the evil that results from our lack of caring, our failure to speak up in your name, and our unwillingness to act like Christians, yet these faults remain invisible to us because we are blinded by privilege and take your grace for granted. While we believe that you desire to raise us all to new life, our fear of dying frequently blinds us to your plan for us revealed in your Holy Word. We lose focus on the end result of your work of redemption in our obsession with the means you employ to bring it to pass. Help us to trust you to lead us where we have not been so that we may find new comfort, renewed strength, and a hope which does not fade away. May we live as those whose lives manifest the grace and power of our Lord Jesus, the firstborn from the dead. Amen.

\*SILENT CONFESSION *(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)*

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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 gift of his son, let us also be reconciled with one another and share His 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, liturgist 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 liturgist 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...*

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

New life in Christ opens our hearts to answer the call of the needy, and opens our minds to a world beyond us living in ignorance of the better world promised by Christ;. May this new life be made real in what we give, so that new life might be possible for others. Let us give as we have been blessed 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

**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... O Giver of all good gifts, we give back but a portion of all we have, that we might learn to loosen our hold on the things of this world and grasp ever more firmly the joys of the next. Gladden our hearts in the giving, that we might be free from thinking our life is found in our possessions. Accept these humble gifts and follow them with your divine blessing that they may hasten the day when all may know that you alone are God and that you alone hold the keys to eternal life and joy, through Jesus 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

**Soloist, Joanna Smith**

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

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the Revelation of John, the twenty-first chapter, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1085 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God..."

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

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

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

Our second lesson this morning is taken from selected verses of the fifteenth chapter of Paul's First Letter to the church at Corinth, beginning at the thirty-fifth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1002 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

But some one will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body which is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is thy victory?"

O death, where is thy sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

"If I Should Die Before I Wake"

The first prayer learned by most children of Christian parents is the meal grace that begins "God is great, God is good. Let us thank Him for our food." The second, is the bedtime prayer, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, my Lord, my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake, I pray, my Lord, my soul to take." This is not just a prayer uttered by innocents, parroting words taught to them by their more worldly parents. It is a recognition that death comes to us all, even children. It dates back to at least the 1600's and a time when any child born had about a 20% chance of reaching adulthood. Death was all too real and touched every home with a very heavy hand. So this prayer was offered a

reminder that the grace of God in Jesus Christ had defeated death forever, and while the body might die, the soul lived on until it could be united with its resurrection body at Christ's coming again.

Today, however, parents are loathe to scare their children with such a prayer have have modified it to remove the scary part. Now it reads, "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray, my Lord, my soul to keep. Angels watch me through the night, And wake me with the morning light." It may seem less scary, but when we act as if something is so awful that we can't even talk about it, the comfort we offer is false and short lived. We tell ourselves that we'll talk about it later when they're older, but then comes the day when we lie in our coffins and we have forever missed the opportunity to share our faith in Christ through what we believe about death. I would be willing to bet right now, that no more than 2 or 3 of you have given any thought to your own funeral beyond going down to Lewis Funeral Home and paying for it. How many of you have picked your scriptures, your hymns, the music for a soloist or the organ? How many of you have taken a minute to ask yourself "What is the one most important last word of wisdom I want left with my children, and grandchildren?" You may jokingly tell yourself that that's the kids' job to do when your gone, but no, it is your job, and to leave it to your children is cruel-- First they are dealing with your loss. The death of a member of your immediate family is so traumatic, that it's hard to see clearly with the shadow of death still lingering over you. Is it right for us to leave it to those we love, when they are least prepared to deal with it. Second, what message do you send to those you love, what does it say about your faith and trust in Christ, if the thought of death is so terrible that you yourself can not bear to deal with it?

And don't feel like you are alone in this. We preachers are themselves a mixed up lot. A quick and easy way to judge the orthodoxy of any preacher, is to listen to a funeral message he has delivered. I have attended funerals where the most profound thing the preacher said was, "Even God is crying" (it was raining at the time of the funeral). I have heard another assure his audience that the tragic death of a young mother was "not the will of God," as though her death was the result of some tragic, administrative mix-up in heaven. The promises of eternal bliss, given to believers in the Scriptures, are treated as if they were the right of all Americans, guaranteed by the bill of rights if not the Bible. Most certainly, it is a faux pas in the extreme for a preacher to even mention "hell," much less the possibility of anyone spending eternity there.

For years I have said I would much rather conduct a funeral than a wedding. Quite honestly, at a wedding, one can say almost anything (and believe me, some do), and people will tell you it was a "beautiful ceremony." A wedding is such a happy moment; no one is really hurting. One could recite, "Mary had a little lamb" and get compliments. But a funeral is different. The reality and finality of death is all too obvious. There are many things which can be said at a funeral, but there is only one message which gives hope, and that message is the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is because the gospel of Jesus Christ has as its central theme and message the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the resulting hope of resurrection and eternal life for every Christian.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul deals with the subject of death and the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. In so doing, Paul gives one of the clearest, most concise definitions of the "gospel" found anywhere in the Bible. He shows how a denial of the resurrection of the dead is a denial of the gospel itself, and how believing in the gospel gives one hope for the next world as well as for the present.

First, Death is no longer an enemy. Death used to be a force to dreaded and fought and avoided at all costs. But Christ defeated Death for all time, and is for us today, no more than a doorway through which each of us must pass to enter the kingdom of God.

In II Timothy 4:6, Paul wrote to Timothy "for I am now ready to be offered and the time of my departure is at hand."

The problem is that we Christians have been taught a wrong view of death. We think we're going from the land of living to the land of dying. But the opposite is true. If you know Jesus, you are going from the land of dying to the land of the living.

The Greek word here for departure is *analysis* which is (a) a nautical term used of a ship which pulls up its anchor and sets sail; (b) it also used in a military way of an army breaking camp to move on; and (c) it was used of freeing someone from his chains.

Do you see? This, for the Christian, is what death is--it's setting sail, it's breaking camp, it's being freed from this life so we can go home. The anchor is weighed and we set sail for the golden shore of the blessed presence of God, carried into God's presence.

Have you never been away from home and then boarded a plane or train, and as the time to depart approached, experienced that warm feeling and the thought--I am going home. This explains what death is like for the believer--it's a going home experience.

There is no intermediate state. The Bible teaches us there is no soul sleep, no purgatory, but instant entrance into God's presence and home. So, heaven is our eternal home. Our Lord is there. Our friends and loved ones in Christ are there. There is no sin nor sinful nature there to cause unhappiness.

In Philippians 1:23, Paul wrote that he had a desire "to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far". In 2Corinthians 5:8 he also said, "We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body (that is, separated from the body by death) and at home with the Lord". These are the words of a man who believed that heaven would begin at the moment of his death.

The soul goes to be with the Lord in heaven, and the body is buried until the day of resurrection when Jesus returns to the earth. First Thessalonians 4:14 says, "We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him." Here you have both sides of the truth. Christians who die are said to be "with Jesus" (that's the soul in the conscious presence of the Lord) and "have fallen asleep in him" (that's the body which "sleeps" in the grave). Listen to Paul's description of that great reunion of body and soul: "For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

1 Corinthians 15:51-55 adds the crucial fact that our bodies will be "raised imperishable"—that is, with a body that is perfect in every way, free from the vestiges of death and decay. In this life our bodies wear out, like a clock continually running down, but when we are raised, it will be with bodies that can never decay, never wear out, never suffer injury, never grow old, never get sick, and thank God, never die.

Mary Bray, a housewife who lived across the street from Johns Hopkins Hospital some fifty years ago, once shared an insight she had gained from hosting an old sailor who came regularly to Hopkins' Cancer Center for treatment.

To make ends meet, after the death of her husband, she had taken to renting out two downstairs bedrooms to patients or their families who were coming there for treatment. One summer evening as I was fixing supper, there was a knock at the door. I opened it to see a truly awful looking man. The appalling thing was his face-- lopsided from swelling, red and raw.

Yet his voice was pleasant as he said, "Good evening. I've come to see if you've a room for just one night. I came for a treatment this morning from the eastern shore, and there's no bus 'til morning."

He told me he'd been hunting for a room since noon. No one seemed to have one.

"I guess it's my face...I know it looks terrible, but my doctor says with a few more treatments..."

For a moment I hesitated, but his next words convinced me: "I could sleep in this rocking chair on the porch. My bus leaves early in the morning."

I told him we would find him a bed, and to rest on the porch, while I went inside and finished getting supper. When we were ready, I asked the old man if he would join us.

"No thank you. I have plenty." And he held up a brown paper bag.

When I had finished the dishes, I went out on the porch to talk with him a few minutes. I soon discovered that he fished for a living to support his daughter, her five children, and her invalid

husband, who was hopelessly crippled from a back injury. He didn't tell it by way of complaint; and he thanked God for giving him freedom from pain and the strength to keep going.

When I got up in the morning, his bed linens were neatly folded and the little man was out on the porch. He declined breakfast, but before he left to catch his bus, he asked, "Could I please come back and stay the next time I have a treatment?" He paused a moment and then added, "Your children made me feel at home. Grownups are bothered by my face, but children don't seem to mind." I told him he was welcome to come again.

On his next trip, he brought a big fish and a quart of the largest oysters I had ever seen. And in the years to come, there was never a visit that he did not bring us fish or oysters or vegetables from his garden.

When I received these little remembrances, I often thought of a comment one of my neighbors made after he left that first morning, "Did you keep that awful looking man last night? I turned him away! You can lose roomers by putting up such people!"

Maybe we did lose roomers once or twice. But oh! If only they could have known him.

Sometime later I visited a friend with a greenhouse, As she showed me her flowers, we came to the most beautiful one of all, a golden chrysanthemum, bursting with blooms. But to my great surprise, it was growing in an old dented, rusty bucket. I found myself thinking out loud, "If this were mine, I'd put it in the loveliest container I had!" But my friend explained, "I ran short of pots and knowing how beautiful this one would be, I thought it wouldn't mind starting out in this old pail. It's just for a little while, till I can put it out in the garden."

She must have wondered why I laughed so delightedly, but I was imagining just such a scene in heaven. "Here's an especially beautiful one," God might have said when he came to the soul of the sweet old fisherman. "He won't mind starting in this dented and scarred old body."

..... Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

#### THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me... Creator God, we give you thanks, that in spite of our abundant disobedience and failures, you have not only not given up on us, but that you are making all things, including us, new. We give you thanks that the day is coming when our aches and pains, our wounds and scars, the progressive weakness of our bodies and and of minds, will be left behind in the grave, only to be made new to be reunited with our souls, our sense of self, and swell with you, joining our voices with all your saints to sing your praises for all eternity.

Lord, bless those who, nearing the end of their earthly pilgrimage, are sometimes tempted to wonder if they have been forgotten. Sustain and gently lead them. With each new step that brings them closer to you, may they come to know and to love the Everlasting Arms, come to know that the You are indeed their Shepherd and will not forsake any of Your flock.

Grant us all the grace to see by faith the twinkling lights of that celestial harbor in which our moorings shall be cast forever. Strengthen our faith and joy as we look forward to that sweet forever where our loved ones wait. Help us to believe where we have not seen, trusting you to lead us through our years that we may live as those who are prepared to die. And when our days here are ended, enable us to die as those who go forth to live, so that living or dying, our life may be in Jesus Christ our risen 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, "There's a Land That Is Fairer Than Day", printed in our bulletins.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“In the Sweet By and By”

There's a land that is fairer than day,  
and by faith we can see it afar;  
for the Father waits over the way  
to prepare us a dwelling place there. *[Refrain]*

*In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore;  
In the sweet by and by, we shall meet on that beautiful shore.*

We shall sing on that beautiful shore  
the melodious songs of the blest,  
and our spirits shall sorrow no more,  
not a sigh for the blessing of rest. *[Refrain]*

To our bountiful Father above,  
we will offer our tribute of praise  
for the glorious gift of His love,  
and the blessings that hallow our days. *[Refrain]*

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 & no dawning. 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

Dr. Elizabeth Davis