

**Worship Service First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia**

**Sunday, July 23rd, 2017**

**PRELUDE**

**"To God Be the Glory" - arr. Robert J. Powell**

**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 Psalm 84 and printed in our bulletins?”

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 84)

How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts!

**My soul longs, indeed it faints for the courts of the Lord;**

My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God.

**In your courts, even the sparrow finds a nest for herself, where she may lay her young.**

We find our home at your altar, O Lord of hosts, our King & our God.

**Happy are those who live in your house, ever singing your praise.**

Happy are those whose strength is in you, in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

**They make even the valley of Baca a place of springs;**

They go from strength to strength; our God will be seen in Zion.

**O Lord God of hosts, hear my prayer; give ear, O God of Jacob!**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Let us pray... We come to you this day, O God, because we know our need of you. We cannot work well by day without your help, and we cannot sleep well at night without your blessing. We come to you because we love you. We want to speak to you and we want to listen to you speaking to us. So come to meet us as we have come to meet you; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Our God Is an Awesome God”, #2040 in our Sing the Faith hymnal supplement.

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

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE**      “Our God Is An Awesome God” (*repeat 3 times*)      *Sing the Faith #2040*

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

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

In Christ we have obtained an inheritance, so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. In penitence and faith, let us come with confidence before the Righteous Judge, who has promised to forgive all our sins, as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its end for a time of silent prayer. Let us pray...

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

O God, we have failed to be Your people or to take our proper place in Your family. Amidst our petty pursuits and goals, we have ignored Your Story and forgotten where we fit into Your narrative. You have created and called us to be children of the Most High God, brothers and sisters of the King of the Universe, but we have refused to accept the obligations incumbent on such nobility. Move us beyond simply being Your children to acting like them as well. Put us in our place, Lord, so that Your grace may shine through us. Bring to our remembrance our place in Your Family so that, even with our shortcomings, we may yet do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with You forever. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

**\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the

riches of his grace that he lavished on 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

Christ is our peace. He came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. So then you are no longer strangers, but citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God. 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 to the lectern & say... "Please be seated.*

SPECIAL MUSIC "Come Thou Fount" - Wyeth/Isaacson Brittany McDaniel Johnson, Soloist

As the soloist leaves the lectern, the Liturgist will step to the microphone and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Who we are, what we are, where we have come from, and all that we have, have but one source-- the Father of us all. We have family members all over the world that are sorely in need of what we have to share. Let us open our hearts and our wallets so that we may give cheerfully and generously to relieve the need of all God's children, 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**

**"O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go" - arr. Robert J. Powell**

\*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... Father of us all and Author of our family's story, bless our gifts and our lives, so that our offerings may help to enlarge and enrich your family. Move our lives to generosity & service. Strengthen our faith & direct us into ministries and service for all our brothers and sisters in need. 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...

"While we remain standing, let us sing our next hymn, "Seek Ye First", #333 in the Hymnal.

\*HYMN OF PREPARATION

"Seek Ye First"

The Hymnal #333

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

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first reading this morning is taken from the third chapter of Paul's Letter to the Colossians, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1027 in our pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."

*The liturgist will take a seat with the congregation.*

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

Our Sermon text for this morning is taken from the sixth chapter of Matthew's Gospel, beginning at the 30th verse. You can find it on page 840 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God....

"But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well."

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

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

"Taking Your Place in The Story"

This Fall we will begin a new all-encompassing curriculum for 39 weeks entitled The Story, a narrative retelling of God's own story of creation and redemption, of mankind's Fall and Restoration. Young and old and everyone in between, will be studying the same part of God's story every week. We will study the story in Sunday School, and we will proclaim it and celebrate it in Sunday worship. In the last 50 years, the church has not had a curriculum that offers as much to God's people as does this one. For a little less than a year, we will place ourselves in God's story and celebrate our redemption and seek to take our place in his plan to bring redemption to all the world.

This series will begin on Sunday, September 9th. Between now and then we will look at the Bible's story on Wednesday evenings in a multi-media presentation, so that we will understand where the Bible came from and why it can be trusted to relate God's story to us. This presentation will begin on Wednesday, August 9th for 4 Wednesdays in the Fellowship Hall.

I hope you will plan to be with us, because learning the story and discovering our place in it is crucial to every one of us and to those we love.

When summers arrived in our family, all of us Morgan boys got to spend a week at my Nanny Isa's house in West Mountain cemetery. There wasn't much there in those days-- a school, an old country store, a tiny little un-air-conditioned Church of Christ, and a cemetery. But she had a barn full of hay and cats, a coop full of chicken, and 80-something acres of woods and creeks, all of which represented an eight year old boy's idea of heaven on earth. Going to her place meant total freedom, in that we would get up early and gather the eggs, help Nanny milk her old Jersey cow, Lily, and right after breakfast we'd head off to the woods exploring, spending the whole day climbing trees, building forts, and our favorite occupation, damming up the branch, or creek if you prefer, so we could go swimming later. When our stomachs, which served as a biological clock and our only timepiece, began to rumble, we knew it was time to head back up to Nanny's house for supper.

But if it rained, there was nothing to do. After 3 or 4 days of liquid sunshine, we'd even look forward to the revivals at the Church of Christ to break up the monotony. It was more fun watching that old preacher shake his bible at me & tell me I was going to hell, than spend one more evening at Nanny's watching her 1920's wallpaper peel off the old ship lap walls.

But then came the summer of '61 when I found a box of old letters and papers and pictures tucked away beneath old shoes and coats in a closet where she kept her memories. One of the treasures was an old picture of my grandfather Aldine, whose family, she said, had come to Texas from Alabama just before the war of Northern Aggression. Aldine was a giant in the county, standing 6'4" tall with black slicked back hair and deep blue eyes. She told me how Aldine was a local genius, able to compute the number of board feet in a whole wagon load of logs with just a glance. He was extraordinarily well educated for a Texas man of 1900. He knew all the usual stuff like arithmetic and algebra, as well as something called calculus. He was the only man in the county who even knew what it was, much less what it was for, or how it was to be used. I heard all about my aunt Dale, Keith's grandmother, who had been the Upshur County Spelling champion. I heard about Little Mac, my uncle and the first of the Morgan children to die in infancy from Diphtheria.

I heard about the Rogers family how they had been in Texas since the days of Stephen F. Austin, and of how her grandfather had fought under Sam Houston at San Jacinto.

The rain continued to fall and the stories continued to flow. I heard all about he was the first man on West Mountain to own an automobile, a gently used Model T that he used on Mondays to run his errands to the County Seat in Gilmer and take my grandmother to the mercantile while he went to the Courthouse. And when he got home, he would park if near his sawmill, take off the right rear wheel, put on a rim with no tire and loop the belt from the big saw around it, and then from Monday afternoon through Saturday noon, his Model T powered his sawmill.

I heard all about how my granddad Aldine had caught the influenza, brought back from Europe by our soldiers returning from World War 1, and how he became delirious with double pneumonia and died before he could tell anyone in the family where he had hidden his stash of gold coins on the farm.

Here I am, 56 years later, telling you about the wonders of that rainy July day in 1961. Because on that very special afternoon, I go to shinny up the family tree and look back and see miles and miles behind me, That vision gave me an understanding of how I had gotten there, of why things were the way they were. And I caught a glimpse of what was ahead. I stood on their shoulders and saw far enough ahead to remove the fear of the unknown. I could look forward with anticipation to a host of wonders and miracles in the life ahead of me.

We need to know where we came from. Knowing connects us, links us, bonds us to something greater than we are. Knowing reminds us that we aren't floating on isolated ponds but on a grand river.

That's why God wants you to know his story. Framed photos hang in his house. Lively talks await you at his table. A scrapbook sits in his living room, brimming with stories. Stories about Bethlehem beginnings & manger miracles. Enemy warfare in the wilderness & fishermen friends in Galilee. The stumbles of Peter, the stubborn .. ness of Paul. All a part of the story.

But they are all subplots to the central message: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). This is the headline of the story: God saves his people! He casts his net over cities and individuals, princes and paupers, the Pontius Pilates of power; and the Peters, Jameses, and Johns of the fishing villages. God takes on the whole mess of us and cleans us up.

This quest is God's story. And we are a part of it!

We can easily miss this. Life keeps pulling us down.

The traffic, the troubles. Tumbleweeds and dust and birth and death. And the randomness of it all. One week you are having a baby; the next you are having to move out of your house. "Good news, a bonus!" "Bad news, a blizzard." Hectic. Haphazard. Playgrounds and cemeteries on the same block.

A horror movie is only REALLY scary the first time you see it. After that, you know how it ends, The fear is gone. Everything changes when you know the rest of your story.

As David discovered, "GOD rewrote the text of my life when I opened the book of my heart to his eyes" (2 Samuel 22:25 MSG). But what is the text of our lives?

The question is not a new one. Self-help gurus, talk show hosts, and magazine headlines urge you to find your narrative. But they send you in the wrong direction. "Look inside yourself," they say.

But the promise of self-discovery falls short. Can you find the plot of a book in one paragraph or hear the flow of a symphony in one measure? Can you uncover the plot of your life by examining your life? By no means. You are so much more than a few days or even decades between the womb and the tomb.

Your story indwells God's. This is the great promise of the Bible and the hope of this book. "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone" (Ephesians 1:11-12 MSG).

Above and around us God directs a grander saga, written by his hand, orchestrated by his will, unveiled according to his calendar. And you are a part of it. Your life emerges from the greatest mind and the kindest heart in the history of the universe: the mind and heart of God himself.

In God's narrative, life on earth is but the beginning: the first letter of the first sentence in the first chapter of the great story God is writing with your life.

Do you feel as if your best years have passed you by?

Nonsense! You will do your best work in heaven. Do you regret wasting seasons of life on foolish pursuits? Of course you do, but you have an eternity to make up for lost time. Are you puzzled by the challenges of your days? Then see yourself as an uncut jewel and God as a lapidary. He is polishing you for your place in his kingdom. Your biggest moments lie ahead, on the other side of the grave.

So as Paul tells the Colossians, "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God". Scripture uses a strong verb here. Zeteite ("to seek") is to "covet earnestly, strive after, to inquire for, desire, even require.

We are to seek heaven the way a sailor seeks the coast or a pilot seeks the landing strip. Head for home the way a pigeon wings to the nest or the prodigal strode to his papa. "Think only about" it (3:2 NCV). "Keep your mind" on it (3:2 GWT). "Set your sights on the realities of heaven" (3:1 NLT). "Pursue the things over which Christ presides" (3:1 MSG). Obsess yourself with heaven!

Open your eyes, Christ invites. Lift up your gaze. "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Matthew 6:33 NKJV). Limit your story to the days between your birth and death, and brace yourself for a sad ending. You were made for more than this life.

Five hundred years ago, sailors feared the horizon. Sail too far and risk falling off the edge, they reasoned. Common wisdom of the ancients warned against the unseen. So did the monument at the Strait of Gibraltar. At its narrowest margin, Spaniards erected a huge marker that bore in its stone the three-word Latin slogan "Ne plus ultra" or "No more beyond."

But then came Christopher Columbus and the voyage of 1492. The discovery of the New World changed everything. Spain acknowledged this in its coins, which came to bear the slogan plus ultra "more beyond."?

Why don't you chisel the "no" off your future? Know your own story, but for heaven's sake, above

all, place yourself in God's story. God has set your heart on home. Keep flying until you reach it.

## THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray... Our Father, sometimes You seem so far away, as if You were a God in hiding, determined to elude all who seek Your face. Yet we know that You are far more willing to be found than we are to seek. You have promised that all who truly seek You will surely find You & that You are with us always. May we be convinced that even before we reach up to You, You are reaching down to us.

For your purpose in us we beg your triumph. May the prayers of our lips become the deeds of our lives, that there be neither prejudice nor arrogance in our quest of fulfillment, that neither weakness nor fear withhold us from shouldering our crosses. Confront us again and again with the love you revealed in your Son. Remind us how costly to you has been the toil of creation, how long and how wearying, how hard and how painful; and help us to handle with reverence a world brought into being by hands bloodied and caloused. We want to be people of faith. We want to be a family with you as our Father. Teach us. Show us how. 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; 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.

### \*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“I Love to Tell the Story”

I love to tell the story of unseen things above,  
Of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.  
I love to tell the story, because I know 'tis true;  
It satisfies my longings as nothing else could do. Refrain:

*I love to tell the story; 'twill be my theme in glory  
To tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.*

I love to tell the story; 'tis pleasant to repeat  
What seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.  
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard  
The message of salvation from God's own holy Word. Refrain:

I love to tell the story, for those who know it best  
Seem hungering and thirsting to hear it, like the rest.  
And when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,  
'Twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long. Refrain:

### \*THE BENEDICTION

### \*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Sanctuary"

Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary, Pure and holy, tried and true;  
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You.

### \*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis