

Sunday, August 9th, 2015

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter and take his/her seat. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The preacher will then ask...

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.

PRELUDE "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder" - Arr. Wilbur Held **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 116 and printed in our bulletins?”

THE CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 116)

I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my supplications.

The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me.

Then I called on the name of the Lord: “O Lord, I pray, save my life!”

Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.

Return, O my soul, to your rest, for the Lord has dealt bountifully with you.

For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.

I kept my faith, even when I said, “I am greatly afflicted”;

What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me?

I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord,

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones.

O Lord, I am your servant; You have loosed my bonds.

I will offer to you a thanksgiving sacrifice and call on the name of the Lord.

I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people;

I will praise him in your midst, O Zion. Praise the Lord!

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... God of the living, whose love embraces countless generations who have looked to you to lead us beyond divisive debate to a gentle exploration of your truth, enfold us in your love that we cannot help but share. Inspire us with a vision of a new heaven and a new earth that awaits us. Enable us to walk in your light; to act in your strength; to think in your wisdom; to speak in your truth; and to live in your love; so that when all our days here are done we may come to dwell in your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!”, number 341 in our Hymnals.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE “Blessed Assurance, Jesus Is Mine!” *The Hymnal #341*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

From the very beginning of human history, we have sought to hide our disobedience from God. But God knows our sins and is at work seeking us out, reconciling us to himself through Jesus Christ. In penitence and faith, let us 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

O God, our Father, forgive us for erecting barriers between ourselves and others. Deliver us from being critical of others, even when we know we could do no better. Pardon us for confusing

understanding with acceptance when it comes to the beliefs of others that are different from our own. Help us always to praise rather than to criticize; to sympathize rather than to condemn; to encourage rather than demean; to build up rather than to destroy. Remind us that it is your intent to spend eternity with the great variety of us. Teach us to focus less on our differences and more upon what we hold in common: a call to love, to serve, and to worship an uncommon Savior. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Thankfully, the gifts of God are irrevocable. We have been disobedient, but God continues to show us mercy. All have been imprisoned by sin but Jesus has promised release to the captives. 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, the 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 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

Great treasures have come to us from God's hand. The air we breathe, the lives we treasure, the love we have known are all gifts from our Creator. We are privileged to be able to say thank you as we dedicate a portion of our resources for the ministry and mission of the church. Let us give generously, as God has given to us 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

"Come Away to the Skies" - Arr. Wilbur Held

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... For the future glory of your church, we offer these gifts and ask for your blessing upon them, Father. Toward the reign of Jesus in our midst, we offer ourselves. O God of all the ages, use these expressions of our gratitude to wipe away tears, comfort those who mourn, and heal those afflicted in body or soul. Work within us individually and among us as a community of faith, that we may bear witness to your good news for all people. 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 & the life everlasting. Amen.

Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.

SPECIAL MUSIC "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" baritone, John Allen Gean

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 her 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 Gospel lesson this morning is taken from the Gospel of Mark, the twelfth chapter, beginning at the eighteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #880 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"And Sad'ducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection; and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the wife, and raise up children for his brother.

There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no children; and the second took her, and died, leaving no children; and the third likewise; and the seven left no children. Last of all the woman also died. In the resurrection whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife."

Jesus said to them, "Is not this why you are wrong, that you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God? For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven. And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God said to him, `I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living; you are quite wrong."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"The Family Reunion"

As we look at our forever home in heaven that is even now being prepared for us, it might be good to ask, "What makes a house a home?"

Since Debbie and I were married 40 years ago, we've lived in 11 different houses. Each has been very different from every other, yet each has been "home".

You may live in a bigger or newer or better or cleaner house than I do, but as nice as your house may be, I would never refer to your house as my home because the people who are most important to me don't live there. It's not where I belong. Robert Frost once wrote that home is where you go and

they have to take you in. It's your soft place to fall.... your hiding place.... your refuge.... It's where you recharge your batteries-- in this case it's where you are loved-- unconditionally, without question.

What makes Heaven our home is not streets of gold, or jeweled walls, or pearly gates. It's not the fact we will live there forever, unaffected by age, ailments or affliction. True, Jesus has promised to prepare the perfect place just for us. Yet, that's still not it. What makes our present house or our place in Heaven "Home" is those with whom we will share it.

So, let me invite you to join me for a few minutes as I introduce you to some of the residents that will help make Heaven-- heavenly and a fit Home for any of us.

First, among the many inhabitants of Heaven we're likely to encounter will be our animals. For instance, my dog Gracie has taught me more about unconditional love, grace, and forgiveness than any human I know. She's the first one to greet me when I come home and is always glad to see me. When I hurt her-- stepping on her tail or forgetting to fill up her supper dish-- she is quick to forgive me and never holds a grudge. It's hard for me to imagine a forever without her and family pets like her.

Perhaps that explains why the first and still the most common question people ask about heaven is, "Will there be animals in Heaven?" I believe that the answer to that question is a resounding **yes!** First, we know that animals populated the Garden of Eden; consequently, we have every reason to believe that they will populate Eden restored. Scripture, in fact, has a great deal to say about animals, portraying them as Earth's second-most important inhabitants and among God's most creative creations. God entrusted Adam and Eve and, by extension, humanity as a whole to rule over and care for the animals of the Earth. And for many of us, our relationships with animals are a significant part of our lives. Heaven's wildlife however will be somewhat different from what we see on the Discovery Channel. You see, when God first created the world, he said, "I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground— everything that has life" (Genesis 1:30 NLT).

In that first paradise—before the fall, before the world was corrupted by sin— all of God's creatures lived in peace with one another. And in the New Heaven and Earth, it will be like that again. In the words of Isaiah, "In that day the wolf and the lamb will live together; the leopard will lie down with the baby goat. The calf and the yearling will be safe with the lion, and a little child will lead them all. The cow will graze near the bear. The cub and the calf will lie down together. The lion will eat hay like a cow" (Isaiah 11:6-7 NLT). While these descriptions of animals peacefully inhabiting the Earth may have symbolic fulfillment in God's family in the here-and-now, their ultimate fulfillment points toward God's eternal kingdom—where mankind and animals will together enjoy a redeemed Earth.

That being said, Scripture doesn't conclusively tell us whether our pets will make it to heaven. In fact, 2 Peter 2:12 ("But these people blaspheme in matters they do not understand. They are like unreasoning animals, creatures of instinct, born only to be caught and destroyed, and like animals they too will perish.") seems to imply the opposite. However, I'm not willing to preclude the possibility. Some of our keenest thinkers, including C.S. Lewis, were not only convinced that animals in general, but pets in particular, will be restored in the resurrection.

In addition to animals, the New Heaven and Earth will also be home to our family-- and not just the family we've known. Our parents, our grandparents, and even our greats and great greats going back all the way to Adam and Eve, the mother and father of us all. And the promise is to our children and our children's children until the end of the age. They will all be there. It will include every believer in our family of birth and-- here's the really amazing part--- our family of rebirth. All of those great Christians that have had such an enormous impact on me-- David Davies, my pastor; Josephine Beck, my adult Sunday School teacher; Mrs. Oglesby my childhood Sunday School Teacher; Fred Craddock who taught me how to preach; and Ray, and Dave and Howard... elders from Port Neches who showed me the meaning of faithfulness; Bob Moon and Mabel Goodman from Hillsboro who taught me what caring for others is all about; And Mary Louise and Sterling and others here who prayed for me every day. I learned the meaning of the word "saint" from them.

And just so you know, **they will not be angels**. Angels are angels. Humans are humans. Angels are spiritual beings with their own histories and memories, with distinct identities. The Bible says, “What are the angels, then? They are spirits who serve God and are sent by him to help those who are to receive salvation” (Hebrews 1:14 TEV). With that in mind, what stories they must have to tell! How would Michael describe the battle against Satan and his demons? How might Gabriel describe the look on Mary’s face when he told her she was pregnant? Even more astounding must be the stories they could share about you. An old Greek proverb says, “There stands an angel by every man as soon as he is born to guide him through the mystery of life.” The Bible says, “He has put his angels in charge of you to watch over you wherever you go” (Psalm 91:11 NCV). Imagine conversing with the angel charged with your safekeeping. How many times did he/she save your life? How many times did he/she intervene invisibly in your daily walk? When you cried alone in your room, was there angel’s shoulder beneath your cheek? Oh, the stories they will have to share!

And when we meet them in heaven, we will know them and they will know us. Here are just a few of those instances in Scripture that I believe support this view.

First of all I think of Saul, speaking to Samuel (coming back from the dead) in 1 Samuel 28:5-19. Samuel was dead and yet Saul recognized him as being Samuel.

When Christ was transfigured on the Mount of Transfiguration, the three disciples who witnessed it were able to recognize Elijah and Moses. The fact that they did suggests we will be able to recognize not only those we have known personally, but saints from all ages.

In the parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16, the rich man obviously recognizes Lazarus.

In Luke 24:13-35 Jesus appeared after his resurrection to the men on the road to Emmaus. They did not immediately recognize Jesus, but did a little later when he broke the bread and gave thanks.

Like Cleopas and his companion on the way to Emmaus, Mary Magdalene in John’s gospel didn’t immediately recognize Jesus, perhaps because at that moment she was blinded by her tears and her belief that his body had been stolen; perhaps because Jesus face had been beaten to a bloody unrecognizable pulp before his crucifixion, and having been there to the end, that is what she expected to see. Whatever her early confusion, she did recognize him shortly after and was filled with joy.

Thomas, who had said he wouldn’t believe in the resurrection till he had put his fingers into the holes in Jesus’ hands and side. But as soon as he saw the Lord, he recognized him and proclaimed, “My Lord and my God,” before ever touching the Master.

So we will know even as we have been fully known. And if you’re worried about that toxic family member who is like a human porcupine and causes pain to anyone who gets close to them, don’t worry about future pain-- not because the difficult person won’t be there, but because their “quills” will have been removed.

Our relationships with them and with each other will be perfectly harmonious— no more broken homes or broken hearts. No more defiant or rebellious teenagers. No more nursing homes or funeral homes. We’ll love one another as we love ourselves— even better, we’ll love one another as God has loved each one of us! That is the end result of the lifelong process of sanctification.

The second most often asked question I’m asked about heaven, is “Will I be married in heaven?” Sometimes it is asked by the abused wife of a departed husband, sometimes by a grieving soulmate-- but to both the answer is the same-- “**NO**, there is no marriage in heaven”-- the contrary teachings of the Mormons notwithstanding. Our love will be complete, and we will love all with the same unconditional love with which Jesus loves us. We do not stop loving our spouses when we get to heaven. We just love others-- and are loved by them-- more completely and fully than we ever believed possible before.

Although human marriage as we know it will apparently not exist in Heaven, Jesus never suggests that deep personal relationships between married people will end. They will remember fondly

the life they forged together on Earth, the children and (hopefully) grandchildren they shared. And all of us will forever be a part of the same eternal marriage-- to Jesus, our bridegroom.

And that is the best part of this whole heaven business.

Augustine once posed the following experiment. Imagine God saying to you, "I'll make a deal with you if you wish. I'll give you anything and everything you ask: pleasure, power, honor, wealth, freedom, even peace of mind and a good conscience. Nothing will be a sin; nothing will be forbidden; and nothing will be impossible to you. You will never be bored and you will never die. Only . . . you will never see my face."

The first part of the proposition is appealing. Isn't there a part of us, a pleasure-loving part of us that perks up at the thought of guiltless, endless delight? But then, just as we are about to raise our hands and volunteer, we hear the final phrase, "you will never see my face."

And we pause. Never? Never know the image of God? Never, ever behold the presence of Christ? Never see the face of Him who loved us more than his own life? Doesn't Augustine's test reveal a deeper, better part of us that wants to see God?

According to Paul we will. And not only that, but we will be amazed at what we see on that day-- "all the people who have believed will be amazed at Jesus." (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

Amazed at Jesus. Not at angels or mansions or new bodies or new creations. What we have only seen in our thoughts, we will see with our eyes. What we've struggled to imagine, we will be free to behold. What we've seen in a glimpse, we will then see in full view. And, according to Paul, we will be amazed. So, what will be so amazing?

You will see unblemished purity and unbending strength. You will feel his unending presence and know his unbridled protection. And—all that he is, he will make you, for you will be like Jesus. Wasn't that the promise of John? "We know that when Christ comes again, we will be like him, because we will see him as he really is" (1 John 3:2).

Seeing him will change us.

Since you'll be pure as snow, you will never sin again.

Since you will be as strong as bronze, you will never stumble again.

Since you'll dwell near the river, you will never feel lonely again.

Since the work of the priest will have been finished, you will never doubt again.

On that day, you will dwell in the light of God. And you will see him as he really is. To each one of us who waits, he offers this word of encouragement, "Don't let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust in me... I will come back and take you to be with me so that you may be where I am" (John 14:1,3 NIV).

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray.... God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob - we confess to you that we are frequently slow to believe what you have promised through your prophets and in your Son Jesus. We succumb to fears of death as if it were the end of everything - as if there is nothing to live for beyond death. Forgive us Lord - forgive us our doubts, our disbelief, and our deafness to the witness of other believers, and our silence when we could give witness to the faith which we have.

God of the living, grant that we might take to heart the lessons of Scripture which testify to your willingness and ability to bring new life to dry bones. Give to those who despair a vision of the resurrection which awaits all those who believe - all those you have chosen. Help them to order their lives by the principles of your everlasting kingdom - that kingdom in which faith, hope and love transfigure all that they touch.

Help us be a people who are prepared for the journey which lies ahead - take from us all evil desire - remove from us any refusal we have to forgive others - lift from us any reluctance we have to love our enemies and to bless, in your name, those who curse us. Send unto us the desire to love one another as Jesus loves us - the yearning to bring your saving word to those who hunger - the longing to speak to others - and to ourselves - your truth. Help us to be ones who are prepared - help us to be

ones who live like Jesus, 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, ““Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand”, printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

“Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand”

Ten thousand times ten thousand in sparkling raiment bright,
The armies of the ransomed saints throng up the steeps of light:
'Tis finished, all is finished, their fight with death and sin:
Fling open wide the golden gates, and let the victors in.

What rush of alleluias fills all the earth and sky!
What ringing of a thousand harps bespeaks the triumph night!
O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made!
O joy, for all its former woes a thousand fold repaid!

O then what raptured greetings on Canaan's happy shore;
What knitting severed friendships up, where partings are no more!
Then eyes with joy shall sparkle, that brimmed with tears of late;
Orphans no longer fatherless, nor widows desolate.

Bring near Thy great salvation, Thou Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect, then take Thy power and reign:
Appear, Desire of nations, Thine exiles long for home;
Show in the heavens Thy promised sign; Thou Prince & Savior, come.

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”

Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis