

## Sunday, August 14th, 2016

*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

"O Worship the King" - Stephen L. Aber

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 80 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 80)

Hear, O Shepherd of Israel, leading Joseph like a flock;

**Shine forth, you that are enthroned upon the cherubim.**

You have brought a vine out of Egypt;

**You cast out the nations and planted it.**

You prepared the ground for it;

**It took root and filled the land.**

You stretched its tendrils to the Sea and its branches to the River.

**Why have you broken down its wall, so that all who pass by pluck off its grapes?**

Turn now, O God of hosts, look down from heaven;

**Tend and preserve the vine your right hand has planted.**

Let your hand be upon the man of your right hand,

**The son of man you have made so strong for yourself.**

And so will we never turn away from you;

**Give us life, that we may call upon your Name.**

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts;

**Show the light of your countenance, and we shall be saved.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

God of grace, whose judgment is evidence of your love for humankind, bring fire among us that we may be united in faithfulness, rather than divided by competing interpretations of your Word. Make us not so much predictors of the future as practicers of faithfulness in this present moment. So witness to us through your word and spirit that we may be equipped for the tasks that we have long neglected and faithfully respond to our calling as witnesses. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Awake, My Soul, and With the Sun”, number 456 in our *Hymnals*.

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

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Awake, My Soul, and With the Sun”

*The Hymnal #456*

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

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

It is difficult to travel along Christ’s way if we choose to carry with us the terrible weight of our sins. Let us accept God’s invitation to lay aside the unnecessary burden, the excess baggage, and lighten our load by confessing our sins before God and one another as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing for a moment at its conclusion for a brief period of silent prayer. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Steadfast God, we admit that we are easily swayed by the company we keep. Forgive us for failing to defend your truth when the attack comes from friends or family. We confess that we would

rather surround ourselves with those who agree with us, rather than be challenged by those who only want us to help them maintain a false sense of security or pretended goodness. Forgive our cowardice and fickleness and help us to find the courage of our convictions. Make us faithful in living and brave in proclaiming your unchanging Word. Hear our prayer in the name of Him who was the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

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

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God paid a high price in giving Jesus to the world, the price of his death because of our sin. We who believe what God has done for us, who receive God's forgiveness, and who surrender to the transformation of God's Spirit are assured of the security of new life in 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

The Lord God speaks peace to his people, for his salvation is at hand for those who fear him. Receive the peace of Christ, and share it with one another. The peace of Christ be with you.

**And also with you.**

*Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

*After a few moments, 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...*

“Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “How Firm a Foundation” #361 in our hymnals.”

\*HYMN OF PREPARATION

“How Firm a Foundation”

*The Hymnal #361*

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

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

**Please be seated.** . . We are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, saints who blazed the trail ahead of us and who have made our way a little easier. Much is required of those who would walk the way of Jesus. But, we give not out of fear or from a sense of duty, but because this is our joyful opportunity to express thanks for all we have received. Let us share gladly and generously 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

"He Leadeth Me" - Terry Kirkland

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... From you, O God, we learn the value of costly giving. Help us as followers of Jesus to give and to love sacrificially that all persons in your family may have all they need to sustain them, both spiritually and physically. Bless our gifts, we pray, and use them to witness to the love and power of Christ. 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**

"Amazing Grace"

Brittany McDaniel-Johnson, Soprano

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

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the Prophet Jeremiah the twenty-third chapter, beginning at the twenty-third verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 672 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Am I a God at hand, says the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the Lord. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, 'I have dreamed, I have dreamed!'"

"How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Ba'al?"

Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the Lord.

Is not my word like fire, says the Lord, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces?"

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

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

Our sermon text today is taken from the twelfth Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the forty-ninth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #906 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled! I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division; for henceforth in one house there will be five divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against her mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**THE SERMON**

"The Great Divider"

Maybe it's because it's election time, or maybe it is just the nature of this particular text, but when I read of Jesus saying that his coming will bring division, not peace, I could not help but remember George W. Bush telling voters that he was a uniter, not a divider.

I will resist the temptation to draw any parallels between the text and this year's political slugfest.

I think most of us approach a fresh hearing of today's reading with thoughts like "Really, Jesus? You've come to bring division-- as if we needed any help with that one. Surely that is not the Good News for us today!"

For example, many students returned to school last Friday, where they will be subjected to division upon division upon division. They will be judged on what clothes they wear to school, how their hair looks, what they say, how smart they are, how attractive they are, what color they are.

As adults, we are constantly dividing ourselves into groups: insiders and outsiders; good guys and bad guys; Republicans and Democrats; Presbyterians, Catholics, Episcopalians, Baptists, Methodists, etc. etc. etc.

Division is a troubling word, and as it happens, divisive talk and actions from Jesus or about Jesus keep cropping up in the gospels. For instance:

When John the Baptist was announcing Jesus' coming, he said, "His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire" (Luke 3:17).

In the early days of Jesus' ministry, when he visited the Nazareth synagogue with his reputation as a preacher and healer preceding him, the congregation initially "spoke well of him" (Luke 4:22). But Jesus wasn't content to leave it at that, and intentionally provoked them with his "hometown" comments to the point that they wanted to dispatch him over a cliff (Luke 4:16-30).

When Jesus spoke to a crowd at the festival of booths in Jerusalem about rivers of living water, some hearers decided he was the Messiah. Others doubted it, however, and the gospel narrator says, "So there was a division in the crowd because of him" (John 7:43).

When a would-be follower told Jesus he first wanted to bury his father, the sense of Jesus' response was that the man should leave his family obligations behind, which, if the man had done so, would have effectively divided him from his family (Luke 9:57-60).

When his mother and brothers show up at one of his local lectures, and Jesus is told that his mother and brothers are there to see him, he practically disowns them in public. He says, essentially, "That's not my mom, and those aren't my brothers. My family are those here gathered with me and those who are journeying with me on this path toward Jerusalem and the cross!"

He then goes on to accept into his new family prostitutes, tax collectors and outcasts, a move that ironically causes division within polite society.

But we would miss Jesus' point entirely if we limit our consideration to the issues around family values. Jesus is dealing with much larger, much more important things than one's family identity. I have known many wonderful people who chose to follow Christ and it cost them more than just their families. It separated some of them from their jobs; some, their money; some, freedom; many, their pride; still others, their very lives.

Jesus is simply saying what must be plain to those who would embrace his way of living and loving. Following me is going to cost you. And don't think for one minute you will escape paying a steep price. My call is to **everyone**, and everyone who answers will lose something they hold most dear.

And the call to choose doesn't just come to everyone; it comes **every day!** Every day we make choices to follow Jesus or not in how we spend our money, our time, our affections and loyalties. There was once an old preacher named Ernest Campbell who challenged himself and his congregation with the question, "If I'm following Christ, why am I such a good insurance risk?"

If the cost of discipleship is potentially so high, if the decision to follow Christ inevitably leads to division, why follow? Why did the disciples leave everything behind and follow Jesus at the sound of his call? Why did the early Christians suffer persecution and death to follow Christ? Why, throughout the centuries, have there always been some who willingly accepted the cost of standing up for the upside-right ways of the kingdom in an upside-down world?

There are few tangible rewards. There is no promise that life will be smooth. The decision to follow is not made with hope of reward, but because of the identity of the One who calls. Because there is no greater joy than relationship with Jesus Christ.

The call of Christ overrides any other loyalty, and other commitment, any other relationship. The call of Christ overrides logic. The joy of relationship with Christ overrides any fear.

Jesus' disciples answered the call to follow Christ. They learned the joy and the cost of discipleship. There's a hymn that summarizes it well:

“They cast their nets in Galilee just off the hills of brown;  
Such happy, simple fisherfolk, before the Lord came down.  
Contented, peaceful fishermen, before they ever knew  
The peace of God that filled their hearts brimful, and broke them too.  
Young John who trimmed the flapping sail, homeless, in Patmos died.  
Peter, who hauled the teeming net, head down was crucified.  
The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod.  
Yet, brothers, pray for but one thing—the marvelous peace of God.”

Jesus has come not to bring the peace that humans seek, the peace that is broken upon the ego of a single man, a single country, a single incident of injustice.

We hunger, thirst, and seek the peace promised by Jesus when he said, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

The peace of God is not just the absence of struggle and discord. It is not just the wherewithal to live a comfortable existence.

The peace of God is something like a magnetic center of calm toward which a Christian is drawn in the midst of turmoil. The peace of God is an anchor that keeps us from being swept away in the storms of life. **God's peace is not the absence of struggle, but the presence of love.**

Jesus did not come so that we could have a happy family life -- though the peace of God may contribute to that. It reminds us that Jesus did not come so that we could get along with our siblings -- though the peace of God may help us live with the conflict or enable us to make the first move toward reconciliation. It reminds us that Jesus did not come so that we could get along with our coworkers and neighbors, though the peace of God may help us stay afloat during the discord and build bridges of understanding.

No, none of that. But one reason Jesus did come was to call us to follow him. Depending on the circumstances of our lives, that may be a very divisive call, and it promises no peace at all ... except the peace of God.

The good news of this difficult passage is that Jesus came to turn the world upside-right, and to create a community that has something more important binding it together than just shared genes.

Jesus isn't teaching about family values as we understand them as modern Americans. Rather, Jesus is saying something radical about identity and who we understand ourselves to be. It can be confusing for a people who pride themselves on individualism and uniqueness, but for people in Jesus time where identity was formed primarily by one's family and kin. The son of carpenter grew up to become a carpenter. The son of a farmer grew up and became a farmer. And if you were daughter, well, you were just property-- like the family cow, or a wagon-- and if you were lucky you got married and got a new identity as the property of her husband.

In their eyes, carpenter's sons were not saviors. They were carpenters.

Family identity was so important that even sin could be inherited, which is why we sometimes hear the crowds in the gospels asking Jesus who in a family had sinned to cause a man to be blind, lame, deaf, or mute. The assumption was that God was so vindictive, God would punish a person for the sins of an ancestor just to prove a point.

But Jesus pushes back against all this. For Jesus, our identity begins not with our earthly family but our divine one. Whereas in our biological families, which are sometimes riddled with sibling rivalries, unworthiness, abuse, neglect or just not being loved fully for who we are, in the household of God, we are beloved, fundamentally and without exception.

That is our identity: We are fully loved by God, even as we are fully known by God.

It is what we proclaim at baptism, that God sees us as his own beloved children. Our baptism marks us as his forever. That is why we say I am baptized, not I was baptized.

Baptism changes us. When we open our eyes to our new identity established by baptism, we see that God no longer calls us strangers, no longer calls us slaves, no longer calls us sinners, but calls us sons and daughters.

And if we like Jesus proclaim this message, then we shouldn't be surprised when our friends and even our families show up, divided and embarrassed by it all, wondering whether maybe we've gone a little crazy.

Will it cause division to stand with those members of our new family rejected by our old one?  
Most certainly.

Martin Luther King, Jr., was divisive. Nelson Mandela in South Africa was divisive. All who dare to speak the truth to power, whether those powers see themselves as sacred or secular, church or state, are divisive.

Anyone who stands with Jesus invites the scorn and persecution of every member of every group who claims victimhood because they choose to violate the plain and time honored teaching of the Word of God.

So, thanks be to God that the love of God causes division, because some things such as holiness, righteousness, justice, and love are worth standing up for. Thanks be to God that the love of God is big enough not just to handle division but to spark it. Thanks be to God that we are God's beloved.

Maybe you're not feeling all that beloved right now.

I know there are lots of days when the best I can muster for myself is the stark recognition that my belovedness in God is not dependent on whether I feel it.

My belovedness in God simply is.

And so is yours.

## THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me... Lord, what is the matter with us that we are so changeable — one moment professing our love for You, and the next moment yielding to temptations that lure us away from You? One moment, cheerful, smiling, and kind, and the next, glum and surly. Lord, we do not understand ourselves, but we pray that there might be some pattern of consistency in our relations with You. Teach us how to maintain life on an even keel, that with a balanced life of faith and trust in Thee, and kindness and love toward each other, we shall not be at one moment up in the sky and at the next at the bottom of a well.

When we find ourselves separated from family and friends on issues of principle and obedience to your Word, grant, God of grace, either that we may be found on your side, or that we may possess the humility to discover our error and change our ways.

Help us to walk with our hand in Your hand. Inspire us to carry into the everydayness of our lives, the goodness you have lavished upon us. May our faith have feet and hands, a voice and a heart, so that it may minister to others, and that the gospel we profess may shine in our faces and be seen in our lives, 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.

Let all of us who are able stand and join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "Are Ye Able?", which is printed in our bulletins.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Are Ye Able?"

"Are ye able," said the Master, "to be crucified with me?"

"Yea," the sturdy dreamers answered, "to the death we follow thee."

*"Lord, we are able." Our spirits are thine.  
Remold them, make us, like thee, divine.  
Thy guiding radiance above us shall be  
a beacon to God, to love, and loyalty.*

"Are ye able" to remember, when a thief lifts up his eyes,  
That his pardoned soul is worthy of a place in paradise? *[Refrain]*

"Are ye able" when the shadows close around you with the sod,  
To believe that spirit triumphs, to commend your soul to God? *[Refrain]*

"Are ye able?" Still the Master whispers down eternity,  
And heroic spirits answer, now as then in Galilee. *[Refrain]*

\*THE BLESSING

\*THE 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