

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of Magnolia, Arkansas

Sunday, August 30th, 2015

PRELUDE "He Leadeth Me, O Blessed Thought" - 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 19 and printed in our bulletins?"

THE CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 19)

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul and making wise the simple;

The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart and enlightening the eyes;

The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

But who can detect their own errors? Clear us from hidden faults.

Keep back your servant also from insolence; so that we may be blameless, and innocent of great transgression.

Let the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Father, we thank you for the gift of our Lord Jesus and we pray that we might indeed experience the fullness of the life that he has promised. Take from us, O Lord, all those things that get in the way of our relationship with you --- our pride and self-certainty, our doubt and our fear--everything that blinds us to the glory of what you are doing in our midst. Deliver us from reducing our traditions and understandings to instruments of judgment rather than tools of your grace. Pour out your Spirit upon us and lead us to a better understanding of your will for us. Plant within us the seed of your Word that it may blossom and bear fruit, not only in our lives, but in the lives of those we touch daily. We pray all these things, O God, in the name of Christ Jesus our Lord and our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart", number 145 in our Hymnals.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart" *The Hymnal #145*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

I am sure that each of us here today thinks, "I'm a pretty good person." But Jesus wants us to look deeper, saying it is what is inside us that makes us unclean. Let us examine our hearts and confess the malignant motives and evil intents that drive our behaviors, so that Christ can cleanse us and make us whole. Let us pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing for a moment at its conclusion for a brief period of silent confession. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Patient God, we admit that we have honored you with our lips while our hearts were far away. We are easily angered and slow to forgive. We speak without listening and pretend to listen without really hearing. Our tongues become weapons rather than instruments of healing. We have taught doctrines from our own limited understanding, and held fast to our human traditions as if they embodied your will. We beg for your forgiveness and for the opportunity to make a new beginning. Turn us around so we can learn to love ourselves and others as you intend, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, God does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us

according to iniquities-- rather the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon those who love him. Friends, believe the Good News! 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

We give to support the work of the church, not because we are good, but because God is good. Let us return to the Lord a portion of the bounty we have received 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

"Pastorale on Psalm 23" - Robert J. Powell

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.... Loving and giving God, accept these offerings from our hands and the offerings we make to you now from our hearts. Sanctify them and us in your service so that all that we say and do may be more than words and rituals. We ask it in Jesus' name. 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

"Deep River" - Arr. Harry T. Burleigh

Brittany McDaniel Johnson, soloist

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the Book of James, the first chapter, beginning at the

nineteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1054 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

“Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rank growth of wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if any one is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who observes his natural face in a mirror; for he observes himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.

But he who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.

If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain. Religion that is pure and undefiled before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

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 Gospel lesson this morning is taken from selected verses of the Gospel of Mark, the seventh chapter, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #874 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

“Now when the Pharisees gathered together to him, with some of the scribes, who had come from Jerusalem, they saw that some of his disciples ate with hands defiled, that is, unwashed. (For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, do not eat unless they wash their hands, observing the tradition of the elders; and when they come from the market place, they do not eat unless they purify themselves; and there are many other traditions which they observe, the washing of cups and pots and vessels of bronze.)

And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?"

And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, `This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men."

And he called the people to him again, and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: there is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile him."

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Religion of the Heart”

Why don't your disciples wash their hands before they eat? I think that's a good question. The twelve disciples aren't exempt from routine hygiene are they? "Go wash up, it's time to eat" --makes sense in any culture. It shouldn't be any different for the twelve disciples. After all, they don't want to get a reputation as the dirty dozen-- do they. They should wash their hands. What's wrong with that? After all, everybody here grew up in homes with mothers who would set dinner on the table and then call us kids in to eat saying, "Suppers ready. Go wash up."

At our house we'd always answer, but Mom, I'm not dirty."

“Yes you are too.”

“I haven’t been doing anything to get dirty .”

“What have you been doing?”

“Been playing with the dog.-- and she cleans herself all the time.”

“Don’t tell me you’re not dirty, you get in there and wash.”

“But I already got clean and had water all over my hands when I was catching crawdads in the creek.”

“Go wash it’s time to eat. And you don’t eat until your hands and face are clean.”

We’d head to the bathroom and there would be a big old gray bar of Lava soap. Remember it? But we’d wash, because we knew we wouldn’t eat if we didn’t.

Now why are we so resistant to that? I was as a child. Washing up for supper, is normal enough now, but then it was a time of great aggravation.

It was a pain to us but a necessity to my mom. She always inspected my brothers and me before we ate. She’d say, “Let me see those hands.” And we’d hold them out... “Other side,” she’d say.... and we roll our palms upward and pray that we didn’t get sent back to lick that calf over. And we’d better get it right on the second try, because if we had to go back and wash again, mom would go with us and wash us herself.

And nobody wanted that, because when mom washed you, the skin came off too.

If you left the table at our house, all the biscuits were gone when you got back. There was no respect and that was the pressure-- you wanted to get in on the food.

It was worse at my grandmothers, cause at night you had to wash your feet too. You couldn’t go to bed until you had washed your feet. You couldn’t get into a nice clean bed without washing your feet.

At Nanny’s house we fight over who got to sleep on a pallet on the floor, just so we wouldn’t have to wash our feet. Any of ya’ll ever done that?

And once or twice a year in the summer, our whole family would go down and spend the weekend with her. And we play and have a grand old time all day. But if we were at her house on a Saturday night, we’d have to take a bath because the next morning we all had to get up and go to church with her. She had a shallow well, and was always concerned in the summer about her well going dry, so she’d put about 2 and a half inches of water in the tub and we’d all take bath’s in turn-- short straw first. If you were last, the water was always cold and somewhat murky. I remember a couple of times when it was my turn, the water was so thick you could plow it. But I made it, and here I am.

So I think it’s a good question. “Why don’t your disciples wash their hands before they eat?”

Well, you and I know that the question they asked had nothing to do with sanitation but with the practice of their religion, Judaism. Certain practices defined who they were and were like badges of honor to the adherents of their faith. It was their way of telling the rest of the world, “By these rites and by these rituals you will know who we are.”

There’s nothing wrong with that. In fact, the more pressure applied to a particular religion by the culture around it, the more important those routine practices become.

I know Christians who make fun of other traditions because of the way they separate themselves from others by their practices. No dancing. No card playing. No men and women or boys and girls swimming together. No dancing. No television. No cutting of a woman’s hair. Some, like me, say, “Just a bunch of meaningless superstitions, tired old rules that don’t mean anything anymore. What does that have to do with *REAL* religion of the heart?”

WRONG!

Every country, every group, every church, and every family has some rites and rituals and symbols to remind us of who we are.... what we stand for.... what our values are....

The raising of a flag in front of a public school.... The singing of the national anthem at a ball

game... The pledge of allegiance.... Irreplaceable!

“Is there a soul so dead that never to itself has said, “This is my own, my native land.”

What church can so strip itself of all rituals and symbols that it could ever think there was something pure about it? We have to have them. We do here. And this is a simple little church-- certainly no grand cathedral-- but there are things that tell us who we are, why we are, what we stand for, what our faith is, and what our values are.

It's only when those things become so exaggerated in their importance or become a test of fellowship, or a means of separating oneself from other people, and become empty of their real meaning and all the reminders of its sacred memories are gone, and they become just something else to do.

Then it can be demonic-- when it can become the religion itself, like a building, or a time, or something else.

That is when the ritual comes under the correcting word of Jesus of Nazareth.

It's not the dirt on your hands... It's your heart. What manner of filth is in your heart? That's the real test! That's what's important.

Do you see the corrective there? Something good got too important and He put it back in place. He says, “It's not what you eat. It's not what goes *IN* your mouth! What goes in, goes into your stomach and out with the waste. Nothing that goes in can make you impure... it's what comes *OUT!*” It's the words you speak and the things you do. That's what's important! See the corrective there?

But, I am very aware that this religion of the heart has to be corrected too. It gets all out of hand and gets distorted and exaggerated. I hear so much about “heartfelt” religion, that something has to be said about it as well.

We can't help how we feel. Feelings are really not all that important. But feelings can produce guilt. It can also get us into trouble with all kinds of sentimental and inappropriate actions one takes to get to “feeling better”.

“I had no shoes and was feeling sad..... until I met a man who had no feet.”

Now what? Feel better? “I saw a man who didn't have any feet &, boy, I feel a LOT better now!”

No.... What's the matter with you? You have gotten all mixed up with this feeling business. You know how to feel better? You got a nice home, nice, car, good job, great kids, plenty of money, good health, It's like you go to the mountains and suddenly you have a down day, the kids have been arguing, you're tired of eating hot dogs, the dog's got all of these woods to do his business in and instead he comes inside and uses the floor of your bedroom. And it starts.... “I should be glad I'm here.... I should feel grateful to share this time with my kids, I oughta feel glad to be alive.... I should feel this.... I want to feel that... How can I feel better...

I know, why don't you just get in the car and drive down some of these back country dirt roads until you find a little shack, with kids running around the yard with no shirt and no shoes, skinny enough that you can count their ribs from the road. And the shack has a rusty tin roof with holes the size of softballs in it and wood slab walls through which you can see right through it to the wash hanging in the backyard.

Now, when you get back to your vacation cabin and you've got a stomach full of hotdogs and a cold beer and you've got your feet up watching the game on the big screen TV-- don't you feel better! Nothing like seeing some of your brothers and sisters living in abject misery and poverty to pick you right up. Right?

No.... That's ridiculous and we all know it.

So how do you feel better? May I suggest something that's quite simple and you can do it right now-- just forget it. Forget it.

The life of a Christian is the call to a certain way of speaking, acting, and doing-- and FREQUENTLY, that means you act ahead of the feeling. You don't wait for the feeling before you act. You don't say, “Well when I feel like it....” What if you told you kids to go clean up their room and they said, “Oh alright, when I feel like it.” Or you go to the doctor's office and he asks how your blood

sugar monitoring is going and you say, “Well, I really haven’t felt much like sticking that sharp thing in my finger. Maybe when I feel like it” Or your wife asks you to take out the trash, and you foolish souls reply, “OK, just as soon as I feel like it.”

Folks, I’m here to tell you that feelings are sand. And you can not build upon sand. You act and then you feel. I’ve known folks who have shown up to teach Sunday School when they had a terrible night’s sleep, and had a throbbing headache, and felt like taking some aspirin and going back to bed, but instead got up, got dressed, put on their makeup, and came to Sunday School even though they knew they would probably only have one kid show up, if that, not because they felt like it, but because that’s what Christians do.

Back in the 60’s when I was in high school, integration was happening all through the South, with considerable resistance. Good Christian people all over town were resisting the process in schools and churches. They would say things like, “Why don’t they leave us alone, We’ll do it when we feel like it. You can’t tell somebody how they ought to feel about something.”

YES YOU CAN. AND SOMETIMES YOU HAVE TO... especially when you have been taught for 20 generations what you’re supposed to do and how you’re supposed to feel about another group of people. You do, and then you feel.

Today, our church stands on the brink of moving from being a good church, to a great church, not because our numbers will grow, though they probably will, but because we have a new generation of Christians coming along to assume the leadership of this church. People, who God willing, are about to learn that how they feel about a task has absolutely nothing to do with whether they are supposed to do it. We have four women and one man who have been teaching Sunday School and Wednesday nights to our children since I got here 6 years ago. And it’s time they had a rest. But, when the call goes out, there’s no one who feels like doing the job. We have a choir that is dying out, not because we are short good voices in the congregations, but because no one feels like committing an hour on Wednesdays to practice so they can sing at a service they would be a part of anyway.

We are in need of people to teach adults on Wednesday nights and Sunday mornings, but we don’t have anyone who feels like committing to teaching. “I’m no Bible scholar” is the usual answer they give when asked. Which is true, but the greater reality is that they are no Bible scholar, because they’ve never felt like becoming one.

We need folks to cook on Sunday afternoons once a semester to help feed the college bunch, but so many of you “feel” inadequate, when the lesson God wants you to learn that with Christ, all things are possible. Even for you and a friend or two to cook for 50 people.

Rather than wait to feel better, or to feel like doing it, I just do it, and I feel great. And yes I may feel worn out, and it gets harder not easier each time, but it is the best tired I ever feel, when I have done something, not because I felt like it, but because I had a chance to demonstrate Christ’s love for me, by showing his love for others.

Feeling follows the Christian act. And sometimes it may be contrary to how you felt about it all your life. Your family may even get upset with you about what you’ve done, but it goes against what you’ve always been told was how you were supposed to feel about it.

I think most of you know how that is, You, most of you, have made or are on the way to making the longest trip of your life, when you move from your head, “I know what’s right....” to your heart, “I do what’s right.”

So on your way home, look out your car’s windows or when you get home sit down by a window and look, really look at the world outside. Depending on where you drive, you will see some joy... some misery.... some hunger.... some pain... a fair amount of ignorance... poverty.... wealth... happiness... sadness....

The question you want to ask yourself isn’t, “How do I feel?”... but “What am I going to do?.... What does God want me to do?.... What am I going to do?”

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD’S PRAYER

Let us pray.... Almighty Father, we confess to you in shame how far we have fallen from grace in your service. You have summoned us to be priests in the priesthood of all who believe, and to open faith's doors for our sisters and brothers; but let us not be too proud to walk those same doors held open by them for ourselves, for we would be doers of the Word and not hearers only.

Keep us ever mindful that it is you who can save and none other and that the works of our hands are the fruits of our faith, not its substance.

Lord, keep us from thinking that we serve you while wanting you to be our servant. Deny us peace in dealing with words but not with the Word, with facts but not with the Truth, with ways but not with the Way. Lead us not into the joy that is blind to the pain of others, but lead us neither into the darkness that is blind to your love. Let not our weakness leave us timid nor our strength make us proud. Help us even when we do not want your help, and cleanse us even when we cherish our sins, 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, "Take Time to Be Holy", printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Take Time to Be Holy"

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His Word.
Make friends of God's children, help those who are weak,
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret, with Jesus alone.
By looking to Jesus, like Him thou shalt be;
Thy friends in thy conduct His likeness shall see.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul,
Each thought and each motive beneath His control.
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

*THE BENEDICTION

Because the world is poor and starving, ... **We will go with bread.**
Because the world is filled with fear, **We will go with courage.**
Because the world is in despair, **We will go with hope.**
Because the world is living lies, **We will go with truth.**
Because the world is sick with sorrow, **We will go with joy.**
Because the world is weary of wars, **We will go with peace.**
Because the world is seldom fair, **We will go with justice.**
Because the world is under judgment, **We will go with mercy.**
Because the world will die without it, **We will go with love.**
It is God who will give you courage and strength to do this.

We go with the grace of Jesus Christ. May all glory go to him.

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Change My Heart, O God"

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true. Change my heart, O God, may I be like You.

You are the Potter, I am the clay; Mold me and make me, this is what I pray.

Change my heart, O God, make it ever true. Change my heart, O God, may I be like You.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis