

**Worship Service First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia  
Sunday, September 10th, 2017**

*The liturgist will enter about 10:40 am & take his seat near the organ. The pastor will step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, & 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.”

*The preacher will take a seat.*

**PRELUDE**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**"Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven" - Michael Burkhardt**

*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 8 and printed in our bulletins?”

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Psalm 8)

O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

**You have set your glory above the heavens.**

Out of the mouths of babes and infants you have founded a bulwark to silence the enemy.

**When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established;**

What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?

**Yet you have made them a little lower than God.**

You have crowned them with glory and honor.

**You have given them dominion over the works of your hands;**

And You have put all things under their feet.

**O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Let us pray... Almighty God and Creator of the Universe, you spoke your word into the void of what was nothing but darkness and brought forth light; a word passed from your lips and the firmament was established; your whispered breath brought life to humankind, and by your word made flesh you have done all that was necessary to redeem us from our transgressions. We have gathered here this day to hear you speak your creative and redemptive Word. We pray that you would silence all voices but your own, that we may hear and respond in joyful obedience, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “How Great Thou Art”, #467 in our *Hymnals*.

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

**\*HYMN OF PRAISE**

**“How Great Thou Art”**

***The Hymnal #467***

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

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

When David’s sins of adultery and murder were revealed, he was overwhelmed by shame, but he discovered to his joy that when he acknowledged his sin to God, and did not hide his iniquity; the Lord forgave the guilt of his iniquity and remembered it no more. Let us relieve ourselves of the burden our sins have laid upon us as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent prayer and meditation. Let us pray. . . .

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

God of grace and love, you created us in your image and gave us every good thing. You asked us to care for your creation, and instead, we have done things that put it at risk. You gave us freedom to make our own decisions, but so often, like Adam and Eve, we make the wrong choice. We succumb to the temptations of power and prestige believing we can get for ourselves all the desires of our hearts. We worship

and desire created things rather than the Creator. Grant us a longing for your presence and a passion for your truth. May we seek above all to know your heart, to delight in your presence, and to desire your ways and thoughts which are higher than ours. Amen.

**\*SILENT CONFESSION**

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

**\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

“Blessed are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” 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**

Forgiveness brings with it the opportunity to start over free of the mistakes that have marred our lives. That freedom to begin again is a gift from God and brings us a peace that only Christ can bring. 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 liturgist will step into pulpit and say...*

“Please be seated... 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 Pastor Mike.”

*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.***

Bring a small whiteboard to the front with an eraseable marker and an eraser. Write God loves..... And then misspell your name. Do the same for the other children present, misspelling each one. Ask the kids what they think of your work. When they point out the errors, erase it and spell it correctly. Then ask them what they think.

Point out that our lives can be just like the whiteboard. When we make a mistake, God will wipe it cleaner with his eraser, the death of Jesus, and we get to begin again-- as many times as we need to until we get in right.

*As the children leave the front, the Liturgist will return to the lectern & say...*

“Would all who are able, please stand and join in singing our next hymn, “All Things Bright and Beautiful”, #267 in our Hymnals.

**\*HYMN OF PREPARATION**

**“All Things Bright and Beautiful”**

***The Hymnal #267***

*After the hymn, the Liturgist will step to the microphone and say...*

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

What shall we return to God for all the bounty of the universe of which we have been given dominion? Let us give as generously as we are able & continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

*The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.*

**THE OFFERTORY**

**Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**\*DOXOLOGY (In Unison)**

***The Hymnal #592***

***Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise Him all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.***

*After the Doxology, the liturgist will return to the lectern and say...*

**\*OFFERTORY PRAYER**

Let us pray... Giver of every good and perfect gift, receive these gifts we bring as symbols of our desire to participate in your work of creation, redemption, and transformation. Use them to push back darkness and despair, and to bring order where there is now only chaos. Accept these gifts & we who bring them that the hungry may be fed, the sick relieved of their suffering, & the oppressed set free, all through Christ our Lord, Amen.

### **THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostle's Creed"

Let us remain standing and reaffirm our Christian faith using the traditional words of the Apostles' Creed printed in our bulletins. Let us say what we believe...

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ His only Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.

*Invite the congregation to, "Please. Be seated," and then sit down.*

### **SPECIAL MUSIC**

**"God of the Sparrow"**

**Joanna Smith, Soloist**

*After the Soloist is finished, the liturgist will return to the pulpit and say....*

### **SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first reading this morning is taken from the second chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews, from the fifth through the ninth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1044 in our pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet."

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one."

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

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

Our sermon text for today is taken from selected verses of the second and third Chapters of the book of Genesis. I will begin reading at the fifteenth verse of the second chapter, and I would suggest that, rather than follow along in your bibles, listen carefully as we read the story. Listen once more for the word of God.

"The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"

And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

“And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?”

And he said, “I heard the sound of thee in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

The man said, “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?”

The woman said, “The serpent beguiled me, and I ate.”

The Lord God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all cattle,  
and above all wild animals;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.

I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.”

To the woman he said,

“I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing;  
in pain you shall bring forth children,  
yet your desire shall be for your husband,  
and he shall rule over you.”

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,  
and have eaten of the tree  
of which I commanded you,  
‘You shall not eat of it,’

cursed is the ground because of you;  
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;  
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you;  
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

In the sweat of your face  
you shall eat bread  
till you return to the ground,  
for out of it you were taken;  
you are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.”

“The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

“Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever”— therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

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

**People: Thanks be to God.**

## THE SERMON

“Beginnings”

When we are young, we love our parents unquestioningly, and grow up believing that they can do anything. But as we get older, we often reject their wisdom and their ways as being old fashioned, and that they are hopelessly mired in tired old traditions. They are so **Yesterday!**

Oddly, even when the world was young, and Adam and Eve were even younger, they felt the same way about God. The idea that God had created this beautiful garden, and placed them here, so he could be close to the, walk with them, tell them of his love for them and his hopes, much as a mother coos at her own young child, filling the child's imagination with stories of all the places he would go, of all that he would accomplish. And all God wanted was their love.

We have trouble keeping ten commandments, but Adam and Eve--- well they couldn't even keep one. And they turned away from God's hopes and dreams, the power with which God had trusted them, and reached out and took that one thing which had been denied them-- the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had told them not to eat of it, but the serpent said it was OK. And in the blink of an eye, they took it and they ate of it.

(By the way, scholars and psychologists have gotten together and delved more deeply into the nature of the fruit, and they have declared it was not an apple after all. Psychologists have concluded there is no way a woman was going to give up everything for an apple. They have now concluded that the forbidden fruit was actually chocolate.)

For a moment it was just as sweet as the serpent had told them. But then, came that bitter after-taste, like you get when you let an aspirin dissolve in your mouth rather than swallow it whole. And for a thousand generations, the bitterness of that fruit has remained on the tongue of each and every one of their children.

The first thing they did was to discover their own nakedness, and so they took some big leaves and vines and through together aprons to hide their naughty bits, which weren't really naughty at all, any more than their eyes and noses. And when they heard God coming, they felt so ashamed of how they looked, that they hid in the bushes. Their first act in God's presence was to hide from him. Do you think maybe that might have something to do with why church attendance and membership is down all over the US and the western world? We know that we have violated the command to love God and neighbor, so we hide ourselves, not in bushes, but in bed under the covers.... on the golf course under the roof of a golf cart... in front of our televisions.... at the mall... in the bosom of our family.... Ironic isn't it.... we are so desperate to hide from God, that we hide ourselves away covered up by family, and in hiding ourselves, we hide them as well, compounding our sin and separating them from God, perpetuating our transgression generation after generation....

Now the humans' actions have brought death and disease into Eden. Not only will they infect the rest of creation with their willful foolishness, they may make their suffering last forever if they eat of the tree of life. Imagine having a cancer that devours a person from the inside out, causing piercing, unrelenting, untreatable pain... FOREVER! Their Father won't let that happen, so he must evict them from paradise.

I can't tell you how many atheists and agnostics have pointed to this story and challenged me by saying, "OK, Holy Boy, where is the grace, the love, the forgiveness in this story?"

The grace for that moment, and the hope for our future is found in this statement: "And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them."

First, God's holiness and justice will not let him rescind his decision to expel them from the Garden. But he can minimize the effects of the punishment. At that moment, Adam and Eve are running around wrapped in leaves. But the leaves will wilt, and they offer no real protection from the elements as it is-- maybe in Eden-- but not out in the real world. So God, his own self, condescends to skin some animals, and stitch those hides together into some real clothes-- not just aprons--- but real clothes that will

protect them from the harsh environment they will be entering. Can you imagine that sight, the time that the God of the universe came down to disobedient children before they trundled off to their permanent time out corner, and took a needle and thread and lovingly sewed together, one stitch at a time, teaching them how to do it themselves, before he sent them out of the intimate relationship he had shared with them, even as he put into place plan B, which was always really Plan A, so that the day would come when they would learn for themselves what he had tried to teach them about life and love, and they might come home to him again. This time forever.

Second, and this may seem like a small thing, but we have to consider---- where did those hides come from? From animals. DEAD animals. Animals that God had killed to provide for his children. Adam and Eve's sin has made it necessary to take the life of innocent animals. Blood had to be spilled to provide a means of survival for the man and woman. It would not be the last time that, in God's mercy, he spilled the blood of the innocent to preserve the lives of the creatures he loved above all things, in spite of their wickedness and disobedience. Sheep, Bulls, sparrows, lambs-- perfect, spotless, innocent lambs-- including one very special lamb sacrificed once for all.

But before they would come home. There were lessons to learn. Hard lessons. Their son Cain, would kill his brother Abel in a pique of jealousy.

Still.... their descendants would grow in number, until the only thing greater than their population, was the level of their evil and depravity.

Here is what we will see over and over again in the story – when humanity is left alone apart from God, the expressions of evil gets worse and worse. This is precisely what happens in the unfolding of the first pages of the Bible. From Cain killing his own brother to the time of the flood, sin escalates to the point of the despicable.

Genesis 6 records an act that is not in *The Story* but it is in the Bible, where some believe evil male angels are taking human women and producing an offspring called *Nephilim*. It's hard to wrap our minds around this, but what we know is that it is a deplorable act, against the design and pattern of God. Let me give you a modern-day example. It is like society saying it is okay to mate with dogs or donkeys, or cows. It's where something so outside of the design and pattern of God is being suggested by people who don't even think it's wrong. Whenever society gets to that place, God has to intervene, and this is exactly what he does.

*The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. Genesis 6:5-6*

This is the most awful declaration we can hear from the lips of God. He regrets that he made us. God says, "Let's start over. Let's wipe out everyone because the evil has run amok and we'll start over with our very best guy in the human race – a guy named Noah. If we start over with the best guy, let's see if we end up with a better end-product. So, that's what he does. Noah builds a gargantuan ark and collects all the animals and his family and closes up the door. A massive flood hits the earth, wiping out everyone and everything except Noah, his family and the animals. When it is all over, they open the door of the ark, they step out and start to rebuild, not from the seed of Adam, but from the seed of Noah. They're going to see if this fixes the problem and leads us back to God.

To us, such a plan makes complete sense.

But did it work? Did it bring us back to God? Nope-- apparently Noah and his family had already been infected with the sin virus from Adam, they took it on the boat with them, and walked off the boat with it. It was only a matter of time until sin raised its ugly head again.

For instance, one night Noah got drunk from wine he pressed from vineyards he planted. He passes out naked inside of his tent. One of his sons named Ham walks in on his dad and finds him naked. He's got two choices. A good choice would be to cover his father up and save him from humiliation. Or, he could make the evil choice, which would be to go out of the tent and tell his brothers and bring them back in to make a mockery of his dad. He choice was evil; he went out and got his brothers. They, however, out

of respect, walked in backwards with a blanket and covered the naked body of their dad without looking at him. They chose good that day, but Ham disgraced his father. It may appear to be a small matter but it signals very clearly that the sin nature is still resident within all humanity, and what we think of as Plan A didn't work.

But God is as determined as He is powerful. As loving as we are selfish. His grace is always greater than our sin. And he has a plan. One we might call Plan B.

What will it take to get us back into the Garden with God? What will God do next? *The Story* is just beginning. Plan B, which in reality was always God's Plan A, is going to work. Stick around, let it unfold chapter after chapter, and you're going to see the extent to which God went to get you back, if you want it. This is just the beginning. And Plan B gives us as many beginnings as we need to get it right.

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

Let us pray... Loving God, you created our world & everything in it and took joy in its perfection. You called it good and claimed every creature as precious and every person as holy.

As your children, we carry the mark of your blessing in every kind word and every generous act, but as children of Adam and Eve, we have saddened your heart and turned your joy into tears by spurning your wisdom and rejecting your love to pursue the promises of all that claims to be new and improved. We pray for a rebirth of charity and that you continue in us the work you have begun in making us a new creation through Christ Jesus. May we learn to see ourselves as you see us, and then strengthen our will to reject whatever devalues the new life you have given. Grant us the grace of a new beginning, established in your love and guided by your perfect will. Lead us to discover new possibilities for peace and fresh windows of hope and change.

For those in positions of power and influence over others, we pray that you would infuse them with a fresh touch of your wisdom. Help them to realize the power for good or ill has been given to them as a trust you have given them, and so fill them with your grace that the power they hold may be used only to the glory of Christ. We pray that there might be more courageous voices who question, challenge, and urge us all to work together for a more a kinder, gentler world. and urge peace.

Thank you for your love which is never-ending and without condition, and that regardless of our past you continue to move us all toward the new day of your reign upon earth, through 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

“Amazing Grace”

*The Hymnal #280*

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

“Spirit of the Living God”

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me;

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis