

## Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, September 11th, 2016

*The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room at about 10:40am. The liturgist will enter followed by the pastor. The pastor will 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?”

Then, this being the 15th Anniversary of the airborne terrorist attacks that killed almost 3000 of our citizens, and precipitated a war which has cost the lives of so many more of our soldiers, one in which we are still engaged. It is appropriate for us to mourn the loss of so many and to remember the examples of the first responders and our fighting men and women. Let us bow our heads in prayer... ”

### PRAYER OF REMEMBRANCE

Good and gracious God, today we come before you fearful and grieving as we remember the events of 9/11. Our hearts still ache for those who lost their lives and those who lost their loved ones. We mourn the nearly 3000 who died that day.

We are humbled by the bravery of the first responders. We continue to grieve with our neighbors the loss of our national innocence – and our false sense of constant safety.

As we remember how churches, synagogues and temples opened their doors to ALL people; as we remember strangers carrying each other out of buildings; as we are reminded of how those who had much

shared with those who had lost, and as we recall the bravery of the passengers and crew of Flight 93 – our pride wells up in us.

We still remember how the world responded, supporting us. World newspapers blared the headline in a hundred different languages, “Today We Are ALL Americans.”

God of all people, teach us to be patriotic but humbly so. Teach us to see the frailty, beauty and value of life in light of this tragedy rather than using it to so elevate trivial differences that our recollections lead too easily to division or hatred.

Remind us of the way the true heart of this nation’s people was revealed by open doors, open arms and open hearts. May we never forget that on that day and its aftermath, we did not focus on our differences in nationality and in matters of faith.

We focused on need. On humanity. On love.

Call us back to that place in our hearts. Instill in us the deepest sense of call to be that people once again.

May we continue to heal and help each other just as we did that day. In the strong name of Him who is our peace, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

*The preacher will take a seat.*

**PRELUDE** "A Solemn Meditation" - Johannes Brahms/Lani Smith **Dr. Elizabeth Davis**

**CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP** "Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema **The Choir**

*After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,*

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Isaiah 40 and printed in our bulletins?”

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

(adapted from Isaiah 40)

Get you up to a high mountain, O Zion, herald of good tidings;

**Lift up your voice with strength, O Jerusalem, and do not fear!**

Say to the cities of Judah, “Here is your God!”

**Behold, the Lord God with might, and his arm rules for him;**

His reward is with him, and his recompense before him.

**He will feed his flock like a shepherd;**

He will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom,

**Gently will he lead the mother sheep.**

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION**

Let us pray... Lord Jesus, we did not come to you. You came to us. You sought us out, reached for us, embraced us. So feed us upon your Word and be filled by your Spirit this day that we may rejoice at being found and return your embrace. Then, in your mercy, remind us of what we are to do now that we are found. We are not to hunker down here in our congregation, safe and secure among people like us, but to be out, working with you, seeking those who have stopped seeking you, lifting up the fallen, inviting everyone to the party called Sunday, called church, called the kingdom of God. When you appear among us, open our eyes to see you and open our hearts to receive you, that we may rejoice with all of heaven that another of your sheep has been found and brought home forever, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “To God Be the Glory”, #485 in our *Hymnals*.

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

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

“To God Be the Glory”

*The Hymnal #485*

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

\*CALL TO CONFESSION

We are precious things to God-- worth seeking when we are lost. Just as we can not hide from him, neither can we keep no secrets from Him. But the Good News is He will not keep His love and forgiveness from us. With the full assurance of faith, let us pray together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer. Let us pray...

\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

O God, we admit that we often feel lost in the strange new world around us. Our moral landmarks seem to have vanished, and we have wandered far from your watchful care. We have doubted your ability and your willingness to seek us out and lead us back to the safety and security of your fold. We have trusted ourselves as though we had no one else to rely upon. And, having been found, we have not done our part to find other lost souls and lead them back to you. Forgive us our foolish wanderings, and our failures to hear and see you close at hand. Deliver us from the pride and arrogance that resist acknowledging our own “lostness” and our obligation to search for others once we have been found. Forgive us, we pray, and lead us home. Amen.

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

\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. We have received mercy, not because we deserved it, but so that Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ... 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

In Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for he is our peace; and he has come to proclaim peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. 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 preacher 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 step to the pulpit and say,*

“Would all who are able please stand and join in singing, “I Sought the Lord”, which is printed in our bulletins.

## HYMN OF PREPARATION

“I Sought the Lord”

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew He moved my soul to seek Him, seeking me.

It was not I that found, O Savior true; No, I was found of Thee.

Thou didst reach forth Thy hand and mine enfold; I walked and sank not on the storm vexed sea.

’Twas not so much that I on Thee took hold, As Thou, dear Lord, on me.

I find, I walk, I love, but oh, the whole Of love is but my answer, Lord, to Thee!

For Thou were long beforehand with my soul, Always Thou lovest me.

*After the Hymn, step to the microphone and instruct the congregation, **“Be seated.”***

## THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We have the opportunity to join with God in seeking the lost and in providing for the poor. Our gifts carry God's mercy to people who have not known God's love or discovered the joy of living in harmony with God and with their sisters and brothers. Let us give with a generosity born of gratitude and continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

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

## THE OFFERTORY "Andante" - Johannes Brahms/Lani Smith

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... Because we have been blessed by you, O God, we are delighted to share. Because there are many who do not enjoy your bounty, we search for ways to help them. Thank you for showing us the way of mercy, the way of generosity, and the way of self-forgetful service, the way of faithfulness and joyous celebration. Bless us and our offerings, that they may be a blessing to others in Christ's name. Amen.

*The liturgist will take a seat until after the Anthem.*

## 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.*

## ANTHEM

The Choir

**"It Is Well with My Soul" - Bliss/Beck/Courtney**

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

**SCRIPTURE READINGS**

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from the Prophet Ezekiel, the thirty-fourth chapter, beginning with the eleventh verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #744 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when some of his sheep have been scattered abroad, so will I seek out my sheep; and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. And I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the fountains, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

I will feed them with good pasture, and upon the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and on fat pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel.

I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the crippled, and I will strengthen the weak, and the fat and the strong I will watch over; I will feed them in justice."

*The liturgist will take his seat, or, if you prefer,  
you may return to the congregation to sit with your family or friends.*

*Thanks for your service.*

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

Our Sermon text for this morning is taken from the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the first verse. You can find the passage on page 908 in your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God. . . .

"Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with them."

So he told them this parable: "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.'

Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

"Or what woman, having ten silver coins, if she loses one coin, does not light a lamp and sweep the house and seek diligently until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin which I had lost.'

Just so, I tell you, there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

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

**People: Thanks be to God.**

**THE SERMON**

"Finding the Way Home"

In the world today, just as in Jesus' time, there are two kinds of people-- those who are lost and those who used to be. Both kinds have gathered around Jesus.

The Pharisees and priests make up the first group. They seethe with hatred for Jesus, He threatens all the decent religious institutions that their families have labored for generations to preserve. He threatens their livelihoods, their positions in their church and community, and their way of life. He so challenges their authority that they are left defenseless in the light of his truth.

But then there are the others. The ones who had been lost in sin that separated them from their people, and they believed from God as well. Many had been separated by disease leprosy, bleeding, madness. For years they had lived lost and alone. The Pharisees and holy men of the Temple had taught for generations that the very presence of their persistent sin or unremitting suffering was the evidence of God's abandonment of them. If God didn't care about them, why should they care about him or anything else.

But then along comes Jesus who eats with them, drinks with them, teaches them, and heals them. He is the Good Shepherd who has left his own home to search the wilderness for those who have wandered from his flock. They are no longer throw aways. They are no longer to be regarded as the least, since Jesus has come and brought them home. Yes they had been lost, but now they are numbered among the found, even though the Pharisees regard them as a basketful of deplorables.

The Pharisees, proud, arrogant, angry, don't even have a clue that they are lost. For a group that sees it as their job to tell everyone else who is lost, who is who and what is what, and just exactly where this place called found is, they are a pretty sad lot. They like the IRS agent who gets lost traveling the back roads in the farmland of the Arkansas delta. Seems he has an appointment to do an audit on a poor farmer and he is planning a surprise visit to seize his records and intimidate him into signing a quick settlement.

But, Apple Maps on his iPhone have left him in the middle of no where. He sees a farmhouse on a neighboring hill, so he drives up there to get some new, and, hopefully, more accurate directions.

When he pulls into the drive, the farmer comes out of the barn. Immediately, the IRS goes for his badge showing it to the farmer, and says, "I'm Agent Brown of the Internal Revenue Service. I need directions to the farm of a Mr. Leroy Jenkins."

The farmer answered softly, "I don't know no Leroy Jenkins."

"Well, then can you tell me how to get to #1345 PR 1324a?"

"Nope. Ain't heard of it neither."

"Well, can you at least tell me how to get to the community of Catfish Hole?"

"Nope. Don't know it."

Frustrated, the IRS Agent proceeded to vent his fury on the old farmer, "Well, Mister, you're just about the most ignorant human being I ever met. You don't seem to know anything about anything!"

"That's probably true, Mister," the farmer quietly replied, "But then again, I ain't the one who's lost, am I."

That's the real tragedy of being lost-- sometimes you don't know you're lost... sometimes you think you're exactly where you are supposed to be. The annals of the NTSB are full of stories of pilots, who were great pilots, but were forced to land by their instruments and didn't know that they were flying upside down just before they hit a mountain or nosedived into a field. It happens.

That's the Pharisees. And, sometimes... it's us too. Life is good we know exactly where we are and where we're going when, out of nowhere, something happens that disorients us and suddenly we're lost.

Remember Dorothy in the story, *The Wizard of Oz*? She is a happy young girl, with family and friends who love her. Oh and her precious little dog, Toto. Life is good until a neighbor, Miss Almyra Gulch, threatens to have Toto arrested and put down. Dorothy is so upset, that her world is suddenly turned upside down. She tries to run away, but a threatening storm drives her back to the farm. She and Toto get caught up in the cyclone & are plopped down in the middle of the technicolor Land of Oz.

Then comes the most understated understatement of all time, "Toto, I don't think we're in Kansas anymore."

She sets off on a journey with her only traveling companions being a guy with no brains, another with no heart, and the third with no courage.

One storm of life and she's lost. Same as us-- a broken marriage,... a frightening diagnosis,... an

economic downturn that just won't turn up, at least not for you.... We look for help, and everywhere we look it's nothing but a sea of brainless, heartless, gutless folks around us who can't help.

But there is a crucial difference between us and Dorothy-- we have someone looking for us. The glory of these two parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin, is that it doesn't matter why or how they got lost. The sheep wasn't evil, it just wandered off. And the coin-- the coin didn't sprout legs and walk off-- someone else was careless. But the only thing we have to remember that someone is looking for them, and they will look until they find them. And when they find them, they will celebrate like there is no tomorrow!

The first thing that these parables teach us is: God is interested in the least. Of course, in God's eyes there are no "least." Every person is valuable. Even if they are covered with tattoos and body piercings and wear blue or purple hair, even if they are steeped in sin, even if they smell bad and have no money, even if they have poor grammar and no education, they are valuable to God.

I have a friend who attends a large church in Texarkana who has fired its excellent senior citizens choir, gotten rid of the old favorite hymns, and begun doing nothing but contemporary praise music-- much of which is being sung by his wife. The older members who have given much of their lives to that church are now heard saying things like, "All they care about is the young people. We are the ones who have been members here all our lives and no one cares about what we think or what we like. They only care about the new people and trying to get outsiders to come. What about us?" They represent the ninety and nine.

A strong case could be made that those already in church are not the ones who are lost. Unless they are the Pharisees, they are already found, and the church should be seeking those who are lost. And it does not matter if the lost look different from us, or are a different color and from a different cultural background. It does not matter if they don't dress like us. I pray that I never live long enough to erect a sign out on the front lawn that says, "No shirt. No shoes. No worship service."

I still remember a cartoon from back in the early sixties showing a poor black man sitting on the front steps of a church with his head in his hands. Suddenly Jesus appeared and sat next to him putting his arm around him. Jesus asked him why he was so troubled. He looked up at Jesus and said, "They won't let me in." Jesus looked him in the eye and said, "Don't let it trouble you. I've been trying to get in for a hundred and fifty years and they won't let me in either."

Jesus, then and now, is trying to help religious folk understand that all people are important to God. They thought that God hated sinners and was not interested in them. They thought they were more important to God than sinners because they had never wandered away. They thought if someone wandered away, it was their responsibility to find their own way back. But God cares about lost people, and he searches for them like the woman searched for her coin or the shepherd for his sheep.

I'll grant you that sometimes it's real hard to see the lost as wandering children of God. The lost may be a mess, but they are no less loved by God. This is because God sees through the filth and crust of sinful ways and habits. His eyes still see the divine original which is hidden in every one of us! . . . When Jesus loved a guilt-laden person and helped him, he saw in him an erring child of God. He saw in him a human being whom his Father loved and grieved over because he was going wrong. He saw him as God originally designed and meant him to be.

And so, we understand that each of us is infinitely important to God. God is not using us to accomplish some great goal, we are the goal. We are the purpose and end of his great plan. What God wants is us — the least of us, the lost among us. And when he finds us he places us on his shoulders and carries us home. He calls all the host of heaven to rejoice over what he has found. We are the prize — the purpose of his work — the focus of his love.

For those of us who have been found spend our days helping Jesus search and bring the lost home. And, if you are one of those who find yourself filling a pew today, and you're not sure why; you may be one of those who are lost and don't know it. Sit quietly and wait, Jesus is looking for you, and he will find you. And He will bring you home.

And then may you discover like Dorothy did-- "There's no place like home.... There's no place like home."

Would you pray with me?...

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

Our Father, sometimes you seem so far away, yet we know that you art far more willing to be found than we are to seek. Thou hast promised "If with all your heart you truly seek me, you shall ever surely find me."

Help us now to be as aware of your nearness as we are of the material things of every day. Help us to recognize your voice with as much assurance as we recognize the sounds of the world around us.

We would find you now in the privacy of our hearts, in the quiet of this moment. We would know, our Father, that you are near us and beside us; that you love us and are interested in all that we do, and concerned with all our affairs. Make us aware of your companionship, through Him who walks beside us.

In those times when we feel forsaken, may we know the presence of the Holy Spirit who brings comfort to all human hearts when we are willing to surrender ourselves. May we be convinced that even before we reach up to you, you are reaching down to us.

Then having been found by you, equip us for the task of seeking our brothers and sisters in the world around us, empower us to call them and to find them; to sit them at your table and put them to the tasks of your household. Make us not just one in redemption, but one in purpose as well, as we seek and save the lost everywhere and win the world for Christ, 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, "Amazing Grace", number 280 in our *Hymnals*.

\*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Amazing Grace"

*The Hymnal #280*

\*THE BENEDICTION

\*THE CHORAL RESPONSE

"God Be With You"

*(The Hymnbook, #78, 2nd tune, God Be With You)*

God be with you 'til we meet again; By His counsels guide, uphold you;

With His sheep securely fold you; God be with you 'til we meet again.

\*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis