

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, September 13th, 2015

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter 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?..... Thank you.”

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE "Fugue in D minor" - Felix Mendelssohn 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 Psalm 146 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 146)

Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live.

Put not your trust in rulers, nor in any child of earth, for there is no help in them.

Happy are they whose hope is in the Lord their God;

For it was He who made heaven and earth, the seas, and all that is in them;

Who keeps his promise for ever and gives justice to those who are oppressed.

The Lord gives food to those who hunger and sets the prisoners free.

The Lord opens the eyes of the blind and lifts up those who are bowed down.

The Lord loves the righteous and cares for the stranger;

He sustains the orphan and widow, but frustrates the way of the wicked.

The Lord shall reign for ever,

Our God shall rule throughout all generations.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Let us Pray --Wonderful God, Almighty Redeemer-- you have declared your love for us from the cross, and revealed your glory through an empty tomb. Be with us this day as we worship you and listen to your word. As you opened the dim eyes, cloudy mind, and hard heart of your disciple Peter, so we pray that you would also open ours. Grant that we may be so renewed in body and spirit that we will hear and answer your call to follow in your steps. Through Jesus' strong name we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “When Morning Gilds the Skies”, number 487 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE “When Morning Gilds the Skies” *The Hymnal #487*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

While we all confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord, our lives tell the world that we are still in control. In how many wrong choices and ways do we reveal our unwillingness to commit ourselves totally to Jesus' way. In penitence and faith, let us confess our sins before God and one another and pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent prayer. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

We confess, O God, that there is that desire within us to fit in rather than be set apart, to conform and be comfortable in the crowd rather than risk the loneliness of separation. You call us to

march to a different drummer, and in responding, we find ourselves out of step with many of those around us. We easily slip out of your ranks to be led by popular opinion, trading peace in our hearts for public approval. Forgive our expedient choices, our constant excuses, and our turning from the abundant life that can be found only in following Christ. Help us once more to see, to believe, and to trust in you and you alone. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

Jesus came to deliver us from the oppression of sin and shame, and to make known through a cross of suffering how wide and deep God's love is. Through Christ we are assured that our sin is forgiven and that we can begin again to follow our Lord as committed and faithful disciples. ...

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 God through the grace of His Son, let us also be reconciled to one another and share Christ's 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, 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,

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

The ways we use the wealth entrusted to us communicate much to the world around us. What message do we send to the world? Do our offerings communicate our delight in knowing and following Jesus? Do they convey our trust in him as Lord of all? Let us tell the world that Jesus Christ is Lord by giving joyfully 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

"Adagio" - Felix Mendelssohn

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

Lord Jesus, your words and ways have always run counter to the popular religion of the day-- as you have moved among the sick to heal... among the oppressed to advocate justice... among the hungry to supply food.... We make this offering that your works of mercy may continue wherever there is need. Receive and bless the little we bring so that our own commitment to you may be increased and that your love may be made real to all, through Christ our Lord. 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.

THE ANTHEM

"Make My Life an Alleluia" - Ruth Elaine Schram

The Choir

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson for this morning is taken from the second chapter of the letter of James, beginning with the fourteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1055 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead."

The liturgist will take his/her seat.

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

Our Gospel Reading this morning is taken from the Gospel of Mark, the eighth chapter, beginning with the twenty-seventh verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #875 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

'And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesare'a Philip'pi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do men say that I am?"

And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Eli'jah; and others one of the prophets."

And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Christ." And he charged them to tell no one about him. And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. And he said this plainly.

And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him.

But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men."

And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; and whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man, to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? For what can a man give in return for his life? For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of man also be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Who Is He?"

School has started. As you have watched kids walking to school, or running home afterwards, perhaps the start of a new school year has awakened old memories in you as it has in me. I remember

how tough it was-- especially kindergarten and first grade. For some kids, it's their first experience with socialization, They've never really been around a whole bunch of other kids and they have to learn-- on top of everything else-- how to get along with others.

It's their first time to be graded. Their mom's have always told them that everything they did was wonderful. Now their in school and they learn that maybe they aren't the next Picasso or Mark Twain.

I still remember how hard it was, even after more than 50 years removed from the experience. Back then I was a skinny little kid-- before 50 years of growth spurts... horizontal as well as vertical... My coping strategy in those early years was not unlike my son's strategy in coping with his military service-- never volunteer and try to blend in with whatever is around you so that you can fly under the radar and remain unnoticed. Once my teacher called roll and I answered, "Present," I didn't ask questions, I didn't raise my hand-- not even to go to the bathroom.

But there was this infernal piece of furniture in the front of our classroom that made it impossible to remain entirely anonymous. It was called the recitation bench.

The teacher would call us up to the front of the room by rows to sit on the recitation bench. Then she would call us by name, and we would stand, and she would ask us a question. In kindergarten she would say, "Michael," and I would stand, "Go to the board and show us the circle." Or, "Go to the board and show us something orange." And the recitation bench got tougher as you got older. In first grade, it became, "Michael, 1 plus eight equals...." Or "Michael, spell 'rat'."

Later grades we would have spelling bees there at the recitation bench, or geography bees where she would ask, "Michael, what is the capitol of Vermont?" I really wanted to ask her, "Look, ma'am, you're the one who's been to college. Why are you asking a fourth grader what the capitol of Vermont is? And besides, who really cares?"

Now, I had a good memory. I knew the answers to those questions. It was just the idea that you were up there in front of God, the teacher and everybody. If you made a mistake or got it wrong, your error was public-- everybody knew that you were an idiot. That's what the recitation bench was so painful.

But as painful as it was, it didn't compare to church. In school all you had to do was parrot back facts and figures or report on other people like Christopher Columbus or Benjamin Franklin. But in church...

When Jesus took his disciples north to Caesarea Phillipi, perhaps to broaden their experience with a different kind of people than they were accustomed to, he asked them to make a report-- sort of like the old recitation bench. "Ya'll have been out and about, milling around among the people. Who do they say I am? What do you hear out there on the street?"

And they began to report. "Some say you're John the Baptist come back from the dead."

"Yeah, Lord," chimed in another, "and some think you're Jeremiah or one of those other prophet dudes."

And then a third volunteered, "And some think you are Elijah, hi own self. As a matter of fact, that's the one I hear most often."

And Jesus answered, "Nice job guys. That's a fine report." But then he looked at each of them, and said, "And **you**.... Who do **you** say that I am? What do YOU say?"

And the recitation bench turns into church. That's the thing about church-- You can't just report on other people. You can't just say what everybody else is saying. You have to report on yourself-- the report is about **you!**

I remember when that time came for me. I was 12 going on 13. I had seen a Billy Graham film at the old Paramount theater and wanted to know more. I was asking lots of questions about the Bible. I even had my own top ten list of hymns. You couldn't dance to them, but they had a sweet melody and great lyrics. I believed. I wanted to join the church, so I went to the minister, and asked if I could

join the church, and he said, "Sure, here's what you have to do..." and when he told me about having to go down front and telling everybody what I believed, I felt like I was back at the recitation bench.

I asked him, "Can't I just do this here in your office, you'll hear me and God will hear me. And that's what's important right? That God hears me. Or even better, how about I do it at home and bring a note from my mom?"

"No," he answered me quietly, "If you confess me before men, I will confess you before my Father in Heaven. and whoever is ashamed of me, of him will I also be ashamed."

"How about we just do it silently? I can come down front and I will make a silent confession, and everyone else can recommit themselves to following Jesus at the same time. We'll kill two birds with one stone. After all, Silence is golden. We've got two ears and one mouth so we're supposed to listen twice as much as we talk."

But you KNOW better, don't you. When it comes to faith, that malarkey about a private confession of faith, just won't wash. Sometimes, you don't even know what you believe until you hear yourself say it.

I know that most of you know the pain of speaking in public-- especially in church. It is the number one fear of all Americans. I think that may be because at a deep level we understand the profound power of a spoken word to change reality, to create something out of nothing-- to bring hope, vision, peace, or joy where before there was despair, anguish, hatred, and every kind of evil. It's still a problem for me after all these years. I can be glib, informative, on occasion even entertaining speaking in public any where but here. But you put me in the pulpit, and I have to say what I believe, it still affects me. I wish desperately that I could get through a sermon without my eyes tearing up or my nose running like a faucet. But God spoke to me, many years ago, and using the words of Shakespeare, this is what He said, "In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell My story."

Yes sir... that old recitation bench is nothing compared to church.

So Jesus turned to his disciples and said, "What about you? Who am I to YOU? And the recitation bench became church.

I remember other things I have said in public. I remember one night surrounded by a crowd of men and boys, and raising my right hand and saying, "On my honor, I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country..." I said that.

I remember that the scariest I ever was in my whole life was when I stood up in church and said, "I, Michael, take you, Deborah, to be my wife; and I promise, before God & these witnesses, to be your loving and faithful husband; for better or worse; for richer or poorer; in sickness and in health; until death do us part."

I've thought a lot about that over the years, most often in a moment of clarity in the larger context of anger. And there's something about saying something in public, especially in front of God and His people, that raise the bar in terms of commitment. It's public nature strengthens the promise so that it is strong enough to get you through the times when you are at your weakest.

And we ask all of you who are members of this church to say this or something like it and derived from it-- "I believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the Living God."

We don't have to understand, all of its implications or underlying meanings. We do have to understand that one thing it means is that Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's love for each of us.

Do you want to know what God is like? Look at Jesus.

It's not enough to say I believe in God. There are folks in the news every day, who lop off heads, and burn people alive, and pose with the victims of their rapes and they put these sadistic acts on tape and chant God is great, just so that we will know that they are doing it in the name of God. What kind of God sanctions that?

We believe in God, as revealed and represented in Jesus Christ. It's not some vague indescribable feeling that we get when we see a beautiful flower or a majestic mountain. You could

spend your whole life surrounded by every manner of tree, songbird, flower, mountain, canyon, river, sunset, and dawning--- and never know what God is like.

What is God like? Jesus.

Do you remember when Jesus was being followed by 5000 men and at least an equal number of women and children... Jesus fed them. That's what God is like.

Do you remember when the leper came ...

You don't start off saying I believe in God and then add Jesus to that. It is Jesus who tells us who God is.

Do you remember when the disciples were arguing about who should sit in the seat of honor, who was the greatest among them. And Jesus took a bowl of water, wrapped a towel around his waist, knelt down in front of each of them and washed their feet? That's God at work.

Do you remember when the soldiers placed a rough and heavy cross upon his already bloody shoulders That's God.

So all of us have answered the question, "Who is Jesus?" or "Do you believe in God as revealed in Jesus?" Some of them had never said it before, and it was hard. but it **was** said.

And when Peter had said it out loud, before God and everybody, Jesus said, "Now don't ya'll run off and tell everybody this. Keep quiet until I tell you different. Don't be telling folks that I am the Messiah, the Son of God."

Why? Maybe it was because the disciples weren't ready. The truth of who Jesus really was needed to soak in. They needed to roll the idea around in their minds a bit until they got a better handle on it.

Maybe it was because the people weren't ready to hear it. God usually has to bring us to a teachable moment before we are ready to listen to and learn anything really important. They have to be ready to admit that they don't have all the answers before they're willing to look for new answers. When their minds are right, you can tell them. But until then-- just wait.

I heard of a preacher once who pastored a little church down the road from Elvis' home, Graceland. One Sunday, this poor preacher stepped into the pulpit and delivered one of his finest sermons to less than fifty people. Where were the other fifty who were usually there? As he drove home, he passed Graceland, and saw a line of people from the house, winding out through the lawn, and down by the gate. That's when he remembered he had heard something on the news about this being Elvis' birthday. And all these people were there on a pilgrimage to the shrine of their king. It was cold and rainy. And he wondered if any of his congregation were there in line waiting to go inside. He parked his car, got out, and took a look. And sure enough, there were his missing church members.

He thought to himself, "They're gonna show up next week and say, 'I'm sorry we weren't here last week, Reverend, but we all took sick.' and I'll say to them, 'Yeah, and I bet you got it waiting in line at Elvis' house didn't you!'"

But he didn't. He never said a word to them about where they were. There are lots of times when we preachers just don't say anything. When anything that is said just wouldn't be helpful or appropriate.

But there are also times when there is one thing that must be said. When there is only one thing that can be said that is the most appropriate thing to be said.

There's a lot in the Bible I still don't understand, but.... I believe that Jesus IS the Messiah. The only Son of the Living God.

And I believe that today is a very appropriate time to say it.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

O God, we thank you for your love, a love seen in your Son who chose the path of suffering for the sake of the world. Humble us by his example, point us to the path of obedience, and give us strength to follow his commands. Help us diminish so you might increase; to die to self so that we might come to life for you; to empty ourselves so that you might fill us with your Spirit and your

power. Remind us Lord of the thousands of people in the world this year who will give up their freedom, their opportunities, indeed their very lives for your sake and for the sake of the gospel and grant us a small measure of their all consuming zeal and steadfast faith. May our weakness be filled with your strength as a testimony to your power. Take our thoughts and our feelings - and remake them so that they are like your Son's - and fill us with your wisdom so that we may be able to know and approve of your good and perfect will.

Father, help us to offer all of ourselves to you. Make us willing to take our place among your people - to care for them and to love them. May we be salt and light for them as Christ has always been for us. All of this we pray in the name of 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, "He Is Lord", which is printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"He Is Lord"

Emptied of His glory, God became a man, to walk on earth in ridicule and shame.

A Ruler yet a Servant; a Shepherd, yet a Lamb; a Man of sorrows, agony, and pain. *Refrain*

*He is Lord, He is Lord! He is risen from the dead and He is Lord!
Ev'ry knee shall bow, ev'ry tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.*

Humbled and rejected, beaten, and despised; upon the cross the Son of God was slain. Just like a lamb to the slaughter, a sinless sacrifice; but, by His death His loss became our gain. *Refrain*

Satan's forces crumbled like a mighty wall; the stone that held Him in was rolled aside.

The Prince of Life in glory was lifted over all; now earth and heaven echo with the cry. *Refrain*

THE BLESSING

Now may the God of peace, who brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, make you complete in everything good so that you may do his will, working among us that which is pleasing in his sight. Amen.

*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