

Sunday, September 18th, 2016

PRELUDE "Let All Things Their Creator Bless" Alfred V. Fedak Dr. Elizabeth Davis
THE 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 23 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP (adapted from Psalm 23)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want;

He makes me lie down in green pastures.

He leads me beside still waters; He restores my soul.

He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil;

For You are with me; Your rod & your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life;

And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... O God, your holiness is not limited to grand cathedrals or spectacular mountains. We have often discovered your majesty in simple, everyday places and people. When we have gathered here, we have encountered you and your grace in the stories of prophets and patriarchs. But no where have we seen you more clearly or powerfully than when, in our worship, we recall our Our Savior actively engaged in his work of redemption. As we worship today, may we be reminded again of his example of grace and glory encased in a human body. Grow us in this hour, that we might be empowered and inspired to imitate Christ and not become merely parodies of Him. In His strong name we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”, hymn number 376 in our Hymnals..

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” *The Hymnal #376*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. Let us ask God’s forgiveness as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a brief period of silent confession. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Holy and Eternal God, we confess that we have tried to hide from you, for we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves, and turned from our neighbors. We have refused to bear the troubles of others. We have ignored the pain of the world, and passed by the hungry, the poor, and the oppressed. O God, in your great mercy forgive our sin and free us from selfishness, that we may choose your will & obey your commandments. Recapture our hearts and minds, Lord, so that we might continually be challenged to put on Christ and be imitators of Him. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. May the God of mercy, who forgives us all our sins, strengthen us in all goodness, and by the power of the Holy Spirit keep us in 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

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 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.

Organize the children into a game of "follow the leader." Choose one child as the leader, and have her stand in front of the others. The leader begins by doing whatever she wants -- raising one arm, two arms, kneeling down, turning around, and the others have to imitate what she is doing. Have her join the group and choose another leader. Then have all the children sit. Compliment them on their ability to follow the leader, and then say that this kind of imitation is not just for fun -- it is also the way we become good Christians. Tell them that the apostle Paul wants us all to be "imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in love, as Christ loved us". Ask them to name some of the things that God wants us to do as we imitate him -- suggest that we be "kind to one another, tenderheart-ed, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you" (4:32). Point out that Jesus is a good leader; we can hear his story from the Bible and learn about how he treated other people. Suggest that we all learn things by imitating and practicing, and ask them to pick one thing to work on in the week to come: love, kindness or forgiveness. Stress that if Jesus is our leader, we will all become better people and grow closer to God.

As the children leave, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

"Would all who are able, please stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, "Jesus Loves Me", #304 in our hymnals."

*HYMN OF PREPARATION

"Jesus Loves Me"

The Hymnal #304

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

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Please be seated. . . We know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ: though he was rich, yet for our sake he became poor, so that by his poverty we might become rich. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given us, let us use them: if service, in our serving; whoever contributes, in liberality; whoever does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Let us share as we have been blessed 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

"All Nature Sings" Alfred V. Fedak

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... Gracious God, you have given us so very much. We have been blessed abundantly

and so we give back to you. We joyfully bring these gifts and offer them up to you that your kingdom may be made great through their use. Help us always to give generously from what little or much we may have. For we know that you are filled with joy when we give fully from our hearts. Thank you for blessing us so richly. 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 then say...

ANTHEM

"Do Not Fear, For You Are Mine" - David Lantz III

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 fourth chapter of the Ephesians, beginning with the thirty-second verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1019 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, & be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

The liturgist will return to his seat with his family in the congregation.

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

Our sermon text today is taken from the sixth Chapter of the Gospel of Luke, beginning at the thirty-second verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #895 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON "Learning to Be Gracious: The Imitation Game"

Twenty five years ago, when I was still in seminary and preaching on the circuit, one of my regular stops was at a little church in Sunrise Beach, Texas. I was there every other Sunday for two years. One Sunday after the sermon, a man I hadn't seen before approached me, and began our conversation saying, "I didn't much care for your sermon."

I asked him what it was he didn't like and he said, "The Scripture you read." I felt a little better knowing that he was finding fault with the Almighty and not with me and I asked, "What was wrong

with it?"

He said, "Bad choice."

I said, "Well, those were words of Jesus."

And he said, "Well, there are a lot of words in the Bible that are out of keeping with the spirit of our time. It's just out of touch. What people expect of the church now-a-days is not a lot of talk about cross-bearing and loving enemies, they want to come to church to feel better, be a part of a group that will help them be successful and whose company they enjoy, so knock off the 'ought' and 'must' and 'should.'"

I said, "Why?"

And he said, "It sets the bar too high. If you keep doing it, you'll never have a church." He said, "Aw, that's fine for those cinderblock churches where people meet once a week to make each other miserable, but don't be out of touch with the spirit of the time or you'll end up just like them."

The words he objected to were heard in this morning's gospel reading-- the same words from the Book that I read more than 25 years ago. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that."

Matthew has this teaching "on a mountain" because he elevates Jesus as the new Moses, bringing the law of God to the earth. And to them all he said in today's vernacular, "If you love people who love you, big deal. What credit is that to you? Sinners do that. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Sinners do that. If you lend to people who lend to you, what credit is that to you? Sinners do that."

Why? Because that's the way God does, that's the way God is. If you want to be my follower you do not let your life become dictated by the people around you. You are not to let those around you, friends or enemies, determine who you are and what you shall do. Your character is created by the character of God.

Now, what is the character of God? God is kind to the ungrateful and to the selfish. That's what he said. And the critic there in worship that day in early June of 1990, bless his heart, said, "Now don't start off setting the bar too high. You'll never have a church. Stay in touch with the times, don't get out there in never never land where nobody lives."

God is kind to everybody. You're to be children of God. as a preacher, part of my job is to throw out a Greek word on occasion to remind you that I done been to seminary, and that I is educated-- I suppose so that everybody feels like they got their money worth-- anyway, the expression three times repeated, "*what credit is that to you*", the word translated "credit" is the word which everywhere else is translated "grace." What grace is that? If you love those who love you, where's the grace? If you do good to those who do good to you, where's the grace? If you lend to those who lend to you, where's the grace? There is no grace.

This is the principle: We are to be gracious as God is gracious. The final work of grace in anyone's life is to make a person gracious, but don't set the bar too high. Stay in touch with reality. Don't go floating off.

It is a beautiful expression, isn't it? God is kind to the ungrateful and to the wicked.

You know what comes to mind when I read this scripture today-- my Grandmother's well at her old farmhouse near West Mountain, Texas. Her nearest neighbors were a large black family, the Lees, who lived down the dirt road from her place. Every so often come August, it would be so dry, that all the hand-dug wells in her little community would all but dry up. The Lee's was one of the first to turn to mud; my grandmother's, one of the last. When it was dry, May Lee would come walking up the hill with buckets and jerry cans to fetch water from my grandmother's well back to her place. She'd knock on the screen door out back nearest the well, and when my grandmother answered she'd say, "I come to get some water Miz Isa, our well is plumb dry."

Then the two would go out to the well. My grandmother would always pick up a stone, rub the dirt off of it as best she could and drop it in her well. That's the way he could tell how much water they

had. If it was just kind of a shallow, cheap, tinnish splish, my grandmother would say to May Lee, "Well, we're going to have to divide this. Looks like we'll have something to drink, maybe wash our hands, but no bath tonight, May Lee." But when she dropped a stone in there and it went, "kerplunk," she would say, "Take all you want; take enough to have a bath, May Lee." And she would laugh and say, "Now let's not get carried away, Miz Isa."

When I read this Scripture I hear deep and profound "kerplunk"-- plenty of grace to go around. And when I think what the man said to me that morning, all I hear is a tiny little "splish."

I heard that "splish" a few years later in Port Neches, Texas, when an older man I had become good friends with through the Emmaus community, was suddenly diagnosed with aplastic anemia. His doctor said, "Have to have a bone marrow transplant or you're going to die, Robert." He was thirty-nine years old. Found a cousin named David, perfect match, *perfect!* But when the time came for the transplant, David said, "I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to have the pain. I'm not going to run the risk, I'm not going to do it."

Robert was so angry and so disappointed; he took the case to Court and the judge said, "Robert, we have all kinds of laws in this state about taking life and hurting life, but we don't have a single law that compels anybody to give life, not a one. I can't, this Court can't, make David give you life. And this Court cannot make you forgive David for not doing it." Where's the grace here, where's the grace?

The fellow at Sunrise Beach said, "Don't set the bar too high."

I said, "Well, I'm not setting the bar."

He said, "Yeah, but you picked that Scripture. There are other Scriptures."

I said, "That's true."

He said, "Get real or you'll never have a church. "

What I said that day is what I say today. It makes no sense for us to think of the grace of God as simply something to wallow around in and feel good, like in a warm bath. What ultimate good does it do us to talk about being saved by the grace of God and how grace covers all our sins, if we never get around to showing grace to others and living gracefully? That may be true, but that's not all that's true. Jesus also said that if you only love people who love you, give to people who give to you, do good to people who do good to you, where is the grace? Where is the grace? You're to imitate Him--be as God is-- gracious.

It came home to me not long ago in the church office, when I got a phone call from my old seminary buddy, J.T. I hadn't seen him since he got married 20 years ago. He said, "I just called you to tell you that I have retired and left the ministry. I'm burned out."

The period at the end of his words sounded a lot like a tiny little "splish."

He went on, "You were always a friend and I wanted you to hear it from me and not from someone else. Do you remember the time when we were in the Smoker's Chapel and we were discussing ecclesiology or eschatology or some other theological B.S., and the direction of our conversation changed and we started off down that little rabbit trail about preaching, and you asked me if I had my choice to preach the rest of my life on one verse, what would that one verse be? You remember that?"

I said, "Yeah. Yeah, I do. I do remember."

He said, "I don't expect you to remember what mine was. "

I said, "Well you're right, I don't."

He said, "Psalm 23, verse 1. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." And then he added, "And I remember yours."

So I said, "What was mine?"

"Yours was Luke 6:35. 'God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.'"

I said, "Is your verse still true?"

He said, "Oh, it's still true. I may have turned loose of God but God has never turned loose of me. The Lord is my shepherd."

I said, "Great!"

He said, "And your verse, is it still true?"

I said, "Yes, yes, still true, still true.-- but then, it seems you've discovered that for yourself."

"Yeah. Yeah, I have."

And when he dropped those words, I swear I heard a big **"KERPLUNK!"**

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Eternal Father, who created us in your own image and fashioned us in honor and glory until we stood but little lower than the angels in your sight, we ask your help in managing the life that you have given us, so that others may look at us once more and see your likeness there.

We are surrounded by so much of wonder and beauty, Lord; yet we often stand in the shadows, dwelling days in darkness, living like those condemned. As members of your church, we belong to the family of those who seek to serve you. Lead us to live as members of that family, and to it give full measure of our capabilities.

Save us from the arrogance that makes us think that we can stand alone and from the selfishness that is content to receive but not to share. In sorrow save us from despair, and in victory from pompousness. Keep us from smiling on the mighty, and despising those of low degree. Defend us from counting anyone beyond redemption. Protect us from being patient with customers, friends, and even enemies, while loosing vengefulness on husbands or wives or children in our homes.

Assist us to learn what things are good and what things bad, what things great and what things small, what things wise and what things foolish; and grant us then the wisdom not to sell eternity for time, neither barter the priceless for trash. We pray that we may have the courage of the faith we profess, the bravery to follow Jesus wherever he may lead and to do our very best to follow his example of gracious living. Hear our prayer and open our hearts to your answer, 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, "O Jesus, I Have Promised", #388 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"O Jesus, I Have Promised"

The Hymnal #388

*THE BLESSING

*THE 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