

Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia

Sunday, September 20, 2015

PRELUDE "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" - Kenneth T. Kosche 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 Zephaniah 3 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Zephaniah 3)

Wait upon me, says the Lord, for the day when I arise as a witness.

On that day I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones;

You shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain.

I will leave in the midst of you a people humble and lowly.

They shall seek refuge in the name of the Lord— the remnant of Israel;

Then they will pasture and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.

Sing aloud, O daughter Zion; shout, O Israel!

Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!

The Lord has turned away your enemies.

The Lord, is in your midst; you shall fear disaster no more.

He will rejoice over you with gladness and renew you in his love;

He will exult over you with loud singing as on a day of festival.

I will save the lame and gather the outcast;

I will change their shame into praise and renown in all the earth.

At that time I will gather you and bring you home;

I will make you renowned and praised among all the peoples of the earth.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Open our eyes, O God, to recognize you in each other and in all we meet. In our worship this day, open our ears to hear you through word and silence, song and symbol, and to feel the warmth of your forgiveness and caring that we share one with another. Let your healing love flow among us, and give us a sense of our great value in your sight that we in turn may lift up others who have fallen, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, "O Worship the King, All Glorious Above", number 476 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE "O Worship the King, All Glorious Above" *The Hymnal #476*

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

*CALL TO CONFESSION

Blinded by pride in our own good works, our place and position in the community, or our own extraordinary abilities, most of us are hard pressed to find anything that we need to confess. Yet John tells us that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. In the bright light of Christ's life and love, let us see ourselves as we truly are and, recognizing our need for forgiveness, pray together the prayer of confession as it's printed in our bulletin. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Loving God, we confess the choices we make that reveal our unkind preferences and our unhelpful prejudices. Forgive us for allowing cultural definitions of greatness to influence us and for forgetting that what is great in your eyes can be the least in the eyes of the world. Forgive us for the cruelties we inflict in our pursuit of popularity. Pardon us for viewing the world through a lens fogged by ambition and envy. Because Jesus has shown us grace and dealt kindly with us even when we deserved his anger, deliver us from turning our backs on the outcast and friendless who committed no offense other

than that of being different from us. Renew our minds and restore us to right thinking and right living, so that we may seek the best for all your children. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

When we truly repent of our sin and come to God with the honesty and humility of a child, God welcomes us. And as a loving parent, God assures us that in Christ we are forgiven. We are free to glorify and give honor to Jesus as we follow him in faithful servanthood.

...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

With our offerings, we give thanks for mercies too numerous to count. Let us share cheerfully and generously from all that has been entrusted to our keeping that God may be praised, and that peace may come to all God's people. Let us 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

"God, Whose Giving Knows No Ending" - Kenneth T. Kosche

*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

Kind and compassionate God, you have given us gifts for sharing and hearts for caring. We hear the cries of your children in distress, and our hearts go out to them with these gifts. May this offering be used according to your will and as symbol to the world that Christ does care for all his brothers and sisters. 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 "Sing to the Lord a New Song!" - Kenneth T. Kosche 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 third letter of John, beginning with the ninth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1070 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"I have written something to the church; but Diot'rephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge my authority. So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, prating against me with evil words. And not content with that, he refuses himself to welcome the brethren, and also stops those who want to welcome them and puts them out of the church."

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 ninth chapter, beginning with the thirty-third verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #877 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"And they came to Caper'na-um; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you discussing on the way?"

But they were silent; for on the way they had discussed with one another who was the greatest.

And he sat down and called the twelve; and he said to them, "If any one would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all."

And he took a child, and put him in the midst of them; and taking him in his arms, he said to them, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"The Disease of Diotrophes"

Theresa Briones is a tender, loving mother. She also has a stout left hook that she used to punch a lady in a coin laundry. Why'd she do it? Some kids were making fun of Theresa's daughter, Alicia.

Alicia is one of about 30 people in the world who suffer from progeria, a genetic disorder that makes its sufferers age and ten times the normal rate. Alicia is bald. Her knees are arthritic. Her nose if pinched. Her hips are creaky. Her hearing is bad. She has the stamina of a seventy-year-old. Alicia weighs only 22 pounds and is shorter than most preschoolers. And she is only 10.

"Mom," the kids taunted, "come and look at the monster."

"She is not an alien. She is not a monster," Theresa defended. "She is just like you and me."

Mentally, Alicia is a bubbly, fun-loving third grader. She has a long list of friends. She watches television in a toddler sized rocking chair. She plays with Barbie dolls and teases her younger brother.

Theresa has grown accustomed to the glances and questions. She is patient with the constant curiosity. Genuine inquiries she accepts. Insensitive slanders she does not.

The mother of the finger-pointing children came to investigate. "I see it," she told the kids.

"My child is not an 'it,'" Theresa stated. Then she decked the woman.

Who could blame her? Such is the nature of parental love. Mothers and fathers have a God-given ability to love their children regardless of imperfections. Not because the parents are blind. Just the opposite. They see vividly.

The insensitive mother refused to see anything new or different. Looking at Alicia with all of her weaknesses and imperfections allowed the ignorant observer to compare her own appearance to that of the child and somehow feel better about herself. But she was so focused on herself that she noticed none of the child's ineffable good humor, her loving nature, her intelligence. Those who took a moment to appreciate them, soon found the surface defects fading from view.

Alicia's mother, Theresa, on the other hand, sees Alicia's inability as clearly as anyone. But, she also sees Alicia's value and she loves her for it. She is able to give thanks to God for every moment of life she can share with her daughter.

And everything that Theresa sees, God sees.

God sees us with the eyes of a Father. He sees our defects, errors, and blemishes. But he also sees our value.

Which brings us to the disciples. At the end of the day's journey Jesus asked, "What were you talking about on the road?" They didn't answer, but Jesus knew. So he sat them down and said, "If any would be number one in my kingdom you must be last and servant to all." And he took a child and hugged it and said, "If you will embrace just one such child, you embrace me and the one who sent me."

Did the disciples understand and accept this new teaching, this new way of looking at the world and responding to it. Apparently not.

Later in this chapter, he has to pretty much repeat this exact message.

Near the end of his ministry Jesus tried to teach them again what it meant to be number one in God's kingdom. He did so by kneeling on the floor and washed his disciples' sin and shame. And to embrace not just a child but the whole world he spread his arms wide and was nailed to the cross.

That was his coronation as the King of kings - a crown of thorns. And when it was over, where was Peter, or James, or John? Where were those twelve disciples who wanted to bask in the glory of God's number one? They were gone. Only the women remained. Yes, the women who had traveled with the disciples attending to their needs, stooping to care for them, and never demanding a position or recognition. At the moment of Christ's victory over sin it was the servants who were at his feet-- not the ones who sought to be number one, but the weak and powerless, the ones who sought only to serve that were there at the end.

The others had been preoccupied with their squabbling on the road and had missed the point.

I want to make sure that you've really gotten a picture of what Jesus was doing on the road to Capernaum.

Jesus, while traveling, was teaching his Disciples the Divine Truth of his incarnation. Jesus was telling them that he was going to be betrayed, murdered and that three days later he would rise from the grave.

He was essentially telling them, before hand, the whole Gospel story.

And what were the disciples doing?

Were they listening with rapt attention?

Were they engrossed in the glorious revelation their master was sharing with them?

Were they truly understanding what Jesus was teaching them?

Were they even listening?

No.

They couldn't see past their own egos. They were so full of themselves and so focused on their own strength, their own goals, their own wants, that they missed the miracle walking beside them. Their ears heard only their own voices and their eyes saw only their own egos. One might say that they suffered from an "I" infection.

Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." In order to drive His lesson home, Jesus brings close to him a small child who happened to be in the house, the child of Peter or Andrew. "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

William Barclay, explains this teaching this way: "A child has no influence. A child cannot advance a man's career, nor enhance a man's prestige. A child cannot give us things; it's the other way around. A child needs things. A child must have things done for him. And so Jesus is saying, 'If a man welcomes the poor, ordinary people, the people who have no influence, and no wealth, and no power, the people who need things done for them, then he's welcoming me. And more than that, he's welcoming God.'"

Fifty years later, the evangelist, Demetrius, is being sent to the town and church served by Diotrephes. Diotrephes is the local bully, a man of considerable influence and power within his own small sphere. He is not a heretic, the doctrine he espouses is sound enough-- but basically he's a bully. He is so intent on maintaining his own power and position that he chases away new ideas, new ways of doing things, even new people.

He refuses to grant other preachers, such as Demetrius, an opportunity to share the good news. He bad mouths John and other apostles at every opportunity. He knows he can't attack their message-- darkness doesn't drive out the light and falsehood cannot defeat the truth-- so he attacks the messenger. He makes up lies and gossips about them incessantly. Diotrephes not only doesn't recognize John's authority, he even spoke against him.

Diotrephes suffered from same disease as the disciples in Capernaum and the thoughtless woman in the laundromat-- he has an "I" infection.

It's real common in schools and youth groups. It's common in adult Christians. want to feel better about yourself, just get your licks in on someone else. Do unto others before they get a chance to do it unto you.

Bullies don't bully because they are to be admired. In fact, they feel so badly about themselves that they are always on the offense like Diotrephes, so afraid of being picked on, that they work overtime to find a weakness or vulnerability in someone else that they can pick at to deflect attention away from their shortcomings. They mistakenly assume that someone must be picked on, so let it be someone else.

But that is a false choice, No one **has** to be bullied. No one **should** be bullied. **And we are not to tolerate it** -- as kids or as adults. And yes, we adult christians are guilty of it too.

And unfortunately, there are plenty of people like Diotrephes in churches everywhere today-- young and old. It's not so much that they want to be first, they just don't want to be last. They want to be admired, respected. They want the glory. They rob God of his inheritance, stealing that which alone belongs to the Almighty.

So common is this problem in church, that Dr. H.E. Robertson, a leader of Southern Baptists once wrote an editorial in the *Baptist Standard* about Diotrephes. Later, the editor reported that twenty-five deacons had written to cancel their subscriptions, feeling that they had been personally attacked.

So what do we do. Well, as hard as it is, we must not try to bully them first. We don't get to kick them out of our group in retaliation for their bullying. We don't get to cold cock them the Theresa Briones did. While what she did was understandable, it was still wrong. We can point out what they are doing, but we are to love and serve them just like Jesus loved and served John and all of the others

who felt like Jesus loved them best, or that Jesus gave them and them alone the keys to the kingdom. He washed their feet.... He prayed for them.... He died for them. That is what changes hearts and turns bullies into servants.

Don't try to hide your weaknesses, or to divert attention from them by pointing out the weaknesses of others. Own your weaknesses, and be proud of them, because that is precisely where Jesus or the evil one-- your choice which one-- will reveal themselves to the world through you.

A boy went into a pet shop, looking for a puppy. The store owner showed him a litter in a box. The boy looked at the puppies. He picked each one up, examined it, and put it back into the box.

After several minutes, he walked back to the owner and said, "I picked one out. How much will it cost?"

The man gave him the price, and the boy promised to be back in a few days with the money. The boy went to work—weeding, washing windows, cleaning yards. He worked hard and saved his money. When he had enough for the puppy, he returned to the store.

He walked up to the counter and laid down a pocketful of wadded bills. The store owner sorted and counted the cash. After verifying the amount, he smiled at the boy and said, "All right, son, you can go get your puppy."

The boy reached into the back of the box, pulled out a skinny dog with a crippled leg, and started to leave.

The owner stopped him.

"Don't take that puppy," he objected. "He's crippled. Get one of the healthy pups."

"No thank you, sir," the boy replied. "This is exactly the kind of dog I've been looking for."

As the boy turned to leave, the store owner started to speak but remained silent. Suddenly he understood. For extending from the bottom of the boy's trousers was a brace—for his own crippled leg.

Why did the boy want the dog? Because he knew how it felt. And he knew it was very special.

What did Jesus know that enabled him to do for us what he did? He knew how we felt, and he knew that each of us is special.

May we never forget that.

Jesus knows how we feel.

He knows what it is like to be called names, to be rejected, and to suffer and even die for people who had just as soon kill him as look at him. You are precious to him. So precious that he became like you so that you could be like him.

When you struggle, he listens. When you yearn, he responds. When you question, he hears. He has been there. You've heard that before, but you need to hear it again.

He loves you with the love of a Theresa Briones.

Like Theresa, he battles with hell itself to protect you.

And, like the boy, he paid a great price to take you home.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

We thank you, God, for the faithfulness of the servant Jesus who followed the path that led him to betrayal and death, and finally to resurrection. We thank you for our life experiences that have taught us to experience what it means to be vulnerable and weak and to know our need of your grace.

We hold as central to our faith and our fellowship the sacrifice and servanthood of Jesus, not losing sight of who he was and is, and ask that you would never let us forget that we are called to be like him. May we, your church, be a haven of rest and redemption for those in need of your love, welcoming and inviting the last and the least, and lifting them up to places of honor. Help us to remember how precious we all are in your sight and grant us wisdom enough to know that we do not make ourselves bigger by making others smaller.

For those who seek to lead others in order to gain in status, and for those who expect earthly rewards for their service to others, we pray that they might instead discover the joy and peace that comes from giving freely of themselves to others in your name. For all your little children who are

suffering injustice or abuse, and for those who visit injustice upon them, we ask that you would use us as channels of your grace to change their lives for their better, 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, "The Servant Song", #2222 in our *Sing the Faith Hymnal* supplement.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"The Servant Song"

Sing the Faith #2222

THE BLESSING

May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of God's Son, Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, remain with you always. Amen

*THE CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Let There Be Peace On Earth"

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me;

Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.

With God as our Father, brothers all are we.

Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me; Let this be the moment now.

With every step I take, let this be my solemn vow:

To take each moment & live each moment in peace eternally.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis