

Sunday, September 24th, 2017

PRELUDE

"Prelude in C Major" - J.S. Bach

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

"Rejoice in the Day!" - Dan Dykema

The Choir

After the Prelude, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 30 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 30)

I will praise you, O Lord, for you have drawn me up, and did not let my foes rejoice over me.

O Lord my God, I cried to you for help, & you have healed me.

O Lord, you brought up my soul from Sheol, and restored me to life from among those gone down to the Pit.

Sing praises to the Lord, O you his faithful ones, and give thanks to his holy name.

For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime.

Weeping may linger for a night, but joy comes with the dawn.

You have turned my mourning into dancing;

You have taken off my sackcloth and clothed me with joy.

Let my soul may praise you and not be silent.

O Lord my God, I will give thanks to you forever.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... We give you thanks, Holy God, for your promises kept and your blessings bestowed. Your wonders embrace us on every hand if we have the eyes to see them. When we are challenged beyond our own abilities and we find ourselves dwelling in the darkness of despair, help us to remember your steadfast love that never leaves us to stand alone against evil powers. Deliver us from our fears and grant us the discernment we need to see you at work for good even when events around us seem evil. 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 Hymnal.

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

God's judgments are in all the earth. Sin is not just the horrendous acts of a few, but the habitual neglect of all of us. It is found not only in the things that become our idols, but in the narrowness of our vision. But God's love for us remains constant, so in penitence and faith, let us confess all that separates us from the living God as we 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

(In Unison)

Sovereign God, we admit our preoccupation with inconsequential inconveniences and petty problems. We have doubted you in the face of affliction and ignored you when things have gone well for us. We have been afraid to trust your assurances and found ourselves demanding much and giving little in return. Forgive our distorted ways of thinking and living, that we may seek the renewal of our covenant with you and with one another. Grant us faith enough, not to see to the end of our journey, but enough to take just the next step with you toward home. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. In everything, God works for the good of those who respond to his love and with trust & obedience. 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**

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. The peace of Christ be with you.

And also with you. *Share the peace of Christ with others as you will.*

After a few moments, the liturgist will step into pulpit and say...

“At this time I want to invite all of our younger friends to come forward for a Word from the Lord brought to them by Pastor Mike.” *The liturgist will take a seat.*

CHILDREN’S SERMON

(All Singing)

***Jesus friend so kind and gentle, little ones we bring to thee;
Grant to them thy dearest blessing. Let thine arms around them be;
Now enfold them in thy goodness, from all danger keep them free.***

Bad Things That Work for Good

Show the children a bottle of cooking oil, a couple of raw eggs, a cup of flour and a box of baking soda. Ask them if they would like to have a snack. When they say "Yes," offer them some cooking oil (yuck!), then a raw egg (gross!), and finally some flour and baking soda (no way!). Find out why these things don't seem very good, and then ask them if there are things they face every day that don't seem very good, either. They might mention fights with friends, family problems, or sickness. Then tell them that "yucky" things can sometimes be combined in such a way that something good is created - oil, eggs, flour and baking soda can be put together to create a delicious cake. Explain that God works the same way: He can take something bad like Joseph's being sold into slavery, and turn it into something good like Joseph's being put into a position that gave him the power to save his family (Genesis 45:4-8). Close by inviting them to see their problems as the oil, eggs, flour and baking soda of life - materials that can be put together to make something completely different and delicious.

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, “His Eye Is on the Sparrow”, hymn number 2146 in our *Sing the Faith* hymnal supplement.

***HYMN OF PREPARATION**

“His Eye Is on the Sparrow”

Sing the Faith #2146

After the hymn, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Please be seated... As those who follow Jesus, we are invited to put the claims of God's realm before all else in our lives. The kingdom of God is not only a future promise; it is a present reality, waiting to be accepted by individuals and shared in community. With trusting and grateful hearts, let us share our blessings 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

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is" - Arr. Charles Callahan

***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, who provides for us beyond our expectations, remind us of your mighty works amid the great drama of human history. As we give from the rich bounty we have received at your hands, may we find reason to celebrate your forgiving, reconciling, healing presence, from which nothing can separate us. Multiply the resources we bring to this time and place, that we may participate with you in the compassionate outreach of Jesus Christ. Amen.

***THE AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

"The Apostle's Creed"

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

I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into Hell; the third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick & 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

"Before the Throne of God Above" - Vikki Cook

The Choir

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

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from the eighth chapter of Romans, beginning at the twenty-eighth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 983 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the first-born among many brethren. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified."

The liturgist will return to his seat either on the chancel or with family or friends in the congregation. Thank you for your service.

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

Our sermon text today is taken from the forty-fifth chapter of Genesis, beginning at the fourth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #40 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, I pray you." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God; and he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Make haste and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not tarry; you shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have; and there I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come; lest you and your household, and all that you have, come to poverty.' And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. You must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Make haste and bring my father down here."

"Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him."

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"The Final Word"

Joseph Ben Israel, or Joe Jacobson, may have been the eleventh of his sons, but he was his daddy's favorite. He was the first born son of his favorite wife, Rachel. He doted on him constantly. His father spent a small fortune on a one of a kind Armani- style coat emblazoned with every color in the

rainbow. Worse still, he was the favorite of his Father in heaven and was told in dreams that his older brothers would bow down and serve him.

Joseph made a point to share this good news with his brothers at every opportunity, just like the day when he went once too often to check on his brothers in the fields. He could have worn clothes a little more appropriate for a hike in the mountains, but NO-O-O-O.... he had to take the expensive coat that marked him as special. And he certainly wasn't FORCED to share the dream revealing that his brothers would one day serve him.

But he did! And for his brothers who had been forced to deal with his being daddy's pet, with his arrogance, his boasting-- this was the last straw. They took his coat, threw him in a pit, covered the coat with goat's blood, and then sold him to slavers heading down to Egypt. Doubtless, they all thought, "he deserves it".... or, "that'll teach him". Joe's brothers were now on top again, and Joseph would learn the virtue of humility. Life had been turned upside down.

Life turns every person upside down. No one escapes unscathed. Not the woman who discovers her husband is having an affair. Not the businessman whose investments are embezzled by a crooked colleague. Not the teenager who discovers that a night of romance has resulted in a surprise pregnancy. Not the parents who must deal with the death of a child.

We'd be foolish to think we are invulnerable.

But we'd be just as foolish to think that evil wins the day.

God always has the final word on any subject. His specialty is recycling evil into good. When God gets in the middle of life chaos becomes order, depravity becomes holiness; cheating and lying are brought into the light of God's justice; hatred becomes love, and evil becomes good.

This is the lesson for us in the story of Joseph. Saddled with setbacks: family rejection, deportation, slavery, and imprisonment. Yet he emerged triumphant, a hero of his generation. Among his final recorded words are these comments to his brothers: "You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good" (Gen. 50:20).

As it was for Joseph, so it has been for many others.

Evil came to Job. Tempted him, tested him. Job struggled. But God countered. He spoke truth. Declared sovereignty. Job in the end chose God. Satan's prime target became God's star witness. Good resulted.

Evil came to Moses. Convinced him to murder an Egyptian guard, liberate a people with anger. God countered. He placed Moses on a forty~year cool down. Moses in the end chose God. He liberated like shepherd, not a soldier. Good resulted.

Evil came to David: he committed adultery; but then David wrote songs of grace, God forgave the great evil he had done, and placed a descendant of David and Bathsheba on a heavenly throne beside him.

Evil came to Daniel: he was dragged to a foreign land, and thrown into the lion's den; but then God delivered Daniel and led him to rule in a foreign land,

Evil came to Nehemiah: the walls of Jerusalem were destroyed and the law of God had been ignored, but God countered. And because he did, ... Nehemiah was able to rebuild Jerusalem's walls with Babylonian lumber and to lead God's chosen people back to him.

Because God had the final word, the evil was defeated and good happened.

And Jesus. How many times in his earthly life did bad become good?

The Bethlehem innkeeper told Jesus' parents to try their luck in the barn. That was bad. God entered the world in the humblest place on earth. That was good.

The wedding had no wine. Bad. The wedding guests witnessed the first miracle of Jesus and tasted the most delicious wine ever made. Good.

The storm scared the faith out of the apostles. Bad. The sight of water-walking Jesus turned them into worshippers. Good.

Five thousand men needed food for their families. Bad day to be a disciple. Jesus turned a basket into a bakery. Good day to be a disciple.

With Jesus, bad became good-- regularly, reliably, refreshingly, & redemptively.

See the cross on the hill? Can you hear the soldiers pound the nails? Jesus' enemies smirk. Satan smiles. All that is evil rubs its hands in glee. "This time," Satan whispers. "This time, I've finally got him where I want him. This time **I** will win."

For a sad Friday and a silent Saturday it appeared he had. The final breath. The battered body. Mary wept. Blood seeped down the timber into the dirt. Followers lowered God's Son before the sun set. Soldiers sealed the tomb, and set guards in place. Night fell over the earth.

Yet what Satan intended as the ultimate evil, God used for the ultimate good. God rolled the rock away, and Jesus walked out on Sunday morning with a smile on his face and a bounce to his steps. And if you look closely, you can see Satan scampering from the cemetery with his forked tail between his legs.

"Will I ever win?" he grumbles.

No. He won't. The stories of Jesus, Joseph, and a thousand others assure us that what Satan intends for evil, God uses for good.

Max Lucado shares the story of his friend Christine Caine as proof of this promise. She is an Australian spark plug. Five feet three inches of energy, passion, and love. To sit down with Christine is to share a meal with a modern-day Joseph. She is at war with one of the greatest calamities of our generation: sex slavery. She travels three hundred days a year. She meets with cabinets, presidents, and parliaments. She stares down pimps and defies organized crime. With God as her helper, she will see sex slavery brought to its knees.

Pretty impressive for a girl whose world was turned upside down.

At the age of thirty she stumbled upon the stunning news of her adoption. The couple who raised her never intended for her to know. When Christine happened upon the truth, she tracked down her biological parents.

The official records of her birth told her this much: she was born to a Greek mother named Panagiota. The box designated "Father's Name" bore the word "Unknown." Christine recounts how she "lingered over this word, trying to understand how someone so important to me could be reduced to simply this ... Seven letters, one word, and that single word seemed so inadequate."!

But there was more. Next to the box marked "Child's Name" was another seven-letter word. It sucked the air out of Christine. "Unnamed."

Father "unknown." Child "unnamed." According to the document, Christine Caine was simply this: "birth number 2508 of the year 1966."

Abandoned by those who conceived and bore you. Could anything be worse? Actually, yes. To be sexually abused by members of your family. Time and time again they took advantage of her. turned her childhood into a horror story of one encounter after another. Twelve years of unbridled and ugly evil.

Yet what they intended for evil, God used for good. Christine chose not to heed the hurts of her past, but instead focused on the promise of her heavenly Father. She laid hold of Isaiah 49: "The LORD has called Me from the womb, from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name." (v. 1). Christine made a Joseph-like decision to believe in the God who believed in her.

Years later when she heard of the plight of girls caught in the sex trade, she knew she had to respond. When she saw their faces on missing-person posters and heard of the abuse at the hands of captors, this unnamed, abused girl set out to rescue other nameless and abused girls. Satan's plan to destroy her actually emboldened her resolve to help others. Her organization has offices around the world. They combat "human trafficking, establish prevention programs in schools and orphanages, represent victims as legal advocates, and give them refuge-- in safe houses, then restoration in transition homes. Several hundred young women have assisted and released.

Once again, what Satan intended for evil, God..... Well, you know the rest.

Or do you? Do you believe that no evil is beyond God's reach? That he can redeem every pit, including the one in which you find yourself?

What if Joseph had given up on God? Lord knows, he could have turned his back on heaven. At any

point along his broken road, he could have turned sour and walked away. "No more. No more. I'm out."

You could give up on God as well. The cemetery of hope is overpopulated with sour souls who have settled for a small god. Don't be among them.

God sees a Joseph in you. Yes, you! You-- in the pit. You-- with your family flops and personal failures. You-- incarcerated in your own version of an Egyptian jail. God is speaking to you.

Your family needs a Joseph, a courier of grace in a day of anger and revenge. Your descendants need a Joseph, a sturdy link in the chain of faith. Your generation needs a Joseph. There is a famine out there. Will you harvest hope and distribute it to the people? Will you be a Joseph?

Trust God. No, *really* trust him. He will get you through this.

Will it be easy or quick? I hope so. But it seldom is. Yet God will make good out of this mess. He has the final word.

That's HIS job.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me...

Eternal God, we can not see to the end of the road ahead, so you have asked us to trust you to lead us along the way. We know not what a day may bring forth, but only that the hour for serving you is always present. Awaken us to the claims of your will for us in this instant, not waiting for tomorrow, but yielding today.

Lay to rest, by the persuasion of Your Holy Spirit at work within us, the resistance of our passion, our indifference, or our fear. Consecrate with your presence the way our feet may go; and our humblest work will shine, and the roughest places be made plain.

Lift us above unrighteous anger and our lust for revenge, so that we may forgive those who have betrayed or abused us. Deliver us into a heavenly peace, and demonstration of faith and hope and charity by a simple and steadfast reliance on thy sure will. In all things draw us to the mind of Christ, that the your likeness which we bore at our creation may be traced once more on our countenance; 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 & join in one voice to sing our hymn of dedication, "It Is Well with My Soul", which is printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"It Is Well with My Soul"

When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, "It is well, it is well with my soul." *Refrain*

It is well with my soul; it is well, it is well with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control:
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and has shed his own blood for my soul. *Refrain*

My sin oh, the bliss of this glorious thought! My sin, not in part, but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more; praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul! *Refrain*

O Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend; even so, it is well with my soul. *Refrain*

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"On Eagle's Wings"

And God will raise you up on eagle's wings, Bear you on the breath of dawn,
Make you to shine like the sun, And hold you in the palm of His hand.