

First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia, Arkansas

Sunday, October 15th, 2017

The preacher should head to the choir room at 10:40am and then offer this or a similar prayer:

O God, help us today to be wise enough to ask for your guidance, and to be humble enough to take it; to be willing to listen to your commandments, and then to be ready to obey them so that we may live in the peace and hope of Christ forever. Amen.

The liturgist will enter and take his seat. The pastor will follow, step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The pastor will then ask...

“Are there any other announcements or concerns of the church that need to be made known at this time?..... Thank you.”

PRELUDE **"Psalm 47: Clap Your Hands"- Robert J. Powell** **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 119 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 106)

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good.

Praise the Lord, for his steadfast love endures forever!

Who can tell of His mighty works, or declare all his praise?

When our ancestors were in Egypt, they did not remember the abundance of His steadfast love.

They rebelled against the Most High at the Red Sea.

Yet he saved them for his name's sake, so that he might make known his mighty power.

He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry; he led them through the deep as through a desert.

So he saved them from the hand of the foe, until not one of them was left.

Then they believed his words; they sang his praise.

They made a calf at Horeb and worshiped a cast image.

They exchanged the glory of God for the image of an ox.

They forgot God, who had done great things in Egypt.

Many times he delivered them, but their rebellion brought them low by their iniquity.

Nevertheless he regarded their distress when he heard their cry;

For their sake he remembered his covenant.

The Lord showed compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love.

Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations!

May we give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.

And let all the people say, "Amen." Praise the Lord!

Let us worship God beginning with prayer....

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... As we come into your Holy Presence, grant, O God, that we may never begrudge any time spent with you in study, in prayer, in service, or in worship. May we always be eager to hear your word; glad to sing your praise; ready to hear your truth; and happy to pray to you, that we may do our part in redeeming the fallen creation in which we live, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken”, number 446 in our Hymnal.

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

***HYMN OF PRAISE**

“Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken”

The Hymnal #446

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

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

God is aware of our fascination with and devotion to golden calves. He is not fooled by pious words, and calls for us to acknowledge our divided loyalties; to repent of our idolatry; and to seek His forgiveness. With the full assurance of faith, let us confess our sins before God and one another, praying together the prayer of confession as it is printed in our bulletins and pausing at its end for a moment of silent prayer and reflection. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

(In Unison)

Lord, we confess that we are a stiff-necked, bull-headed people, who worship idols of every description and who prefer comforts over commandments. When you fail to give us what we want when we want it, we make ourselves a golden calf-- an indulgent, undemanding idol who promises the good life with no surrender, suffering, or sacrifice. In so doing, we find ourselves praying to a lifeless piece of stone, a god created by our hands, rather than kneeling in homage to the living God who created us in love with his own hands. Forgive our ingratitude and our infidelity, and show us the patience that we have withheld from you. Reassure us of your continued presence & protection, even though we do not deserve it. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

In Christ we have redemption through his blood; the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us.... 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 the Father through the grace of his Son, let us be reconciled to one another and share the peace of Christ. 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.***

“Waiting for God”

Waiting is never easy. Gather the children in the front of the sanctuary. After they have gathered, tell them that you need to do something important, but will be back real soon. You may even leave one of the kids in charge. Leave them by themselves while you continue on with the service. Although you might want to have a ringer in the crowd that stimulates the children to do something they know they shouldn't, it might really be interesting to see how the kids react to being left alone. After some time has passed, re-join the kids to hear about their experience. Of course, you may have to rejoin them sooner than you expected. Tell them the story of how Moses left the people of Israel by themselves when he went up the mountain to get the Law from God. It will be interesting to see how the kids' behavior is similar to or varies from that of the children of Israel.

Let's pray and ask God to help us to wait on him for as long as it takes-- until he is ready, or until he has made us ready.

Dear God, thank you for being patient with us and giving us enough time to grow up into disciples who are able to know and share your word and your love. And help us to be patient with others as they

grow to be like Jesus, and patient with you as you prepare the way to heaven for each of us. Amen.

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

A MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP

"Five Loaves and Two Fishes"

A Video

After the Stewardship Video is finished, the Liturgist will return to the lectern and say...

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

The work of Christ's body on earth, requires the gifts of self and substance so that we can do our part in His work of redemption and reconciliation. Let us give gladly and generously, knowing that God will bless both gift and giver to His glory. 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 "Lord, I Want to be a Christian" - Robert J. Powell 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 blessed us with all that we need and often more than we need. Help us receive what you give with grace. In turn, help us be generous — with our monetary gifts, our possessions, our talents and our time. We ask that you would accept and consecrate all these gifts to further your work in the world. 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

"I Have Felt the Hand of God" - Craig Courtney

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 first Chapter of Romans, beginning at the eighteenth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #977 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of men who by their wickedness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

"Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse; for although they knew God they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking and their senseless minds were darkened.

"Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man or birds or animals or reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen."

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

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

Our sermon text today is taken from the book of Exodus, the 32nd Chapter, beginning at the first verse. If you would like to read along, you can find it on page 74 of your pew bibles. Listen once more for the Word of God:

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron, and said to him, "Up, make us gods, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."

And Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me."

So all the people took off the rings of gold which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made a molten calf; and they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!"

When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD."

And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down; for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!'"

And the LORD said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; but of you I will make a great nation."

But Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, "O LORD, why does thy wrath burn hot against thy people, whom thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them forth, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to whom thou didst swear by thine own self, and didst say to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it for ever.'"

And the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do to his people.

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

“Bull-Headed People”

Family vacations can be tough. It's really not the actual vacation that children and parents find so difficult, but the journey to get there. Travelling with my folks to visit my maternal grandmother in Illinois, was always the worst for us. My dad was a chain smoker, especially when he was driving. He also hated the noise of the wind coming from open car windows that prevented him from hearing whatever baseball game was on at the time. So as the car filled with smoke, and I began to feel its effects, my life flashed before my eyes-- it took all of three seconds--- and I imagined myself being strapped into the gas chamber waiting for the cyanide to bring my short little life to an end. There was no stopping except for one bathroom break some where in Northern Arkansas, where he would buy a loaf of brea and a package of bologna before we were on the road again.

When my own kids came along, they had it way better, but still hated the trip from Southeast Texas to come home for Christmas or whatever. Maggie would complain that Josh had let his stuff get on her side of the backseat. Josh would complain in return that she was breathing HIS air. If they ever did settle down and get quiet for anything other than a nap, it was only because Josh became preoccupied

with kicking my seat back in tempo with whatever children's song he was listening to on his headphones.

I know we're not the only family that has experienced the joy of traveling together as a family. In her biography, Ruth Bell Graham told of driving to Texas to visit her brother, Nelson Bell who was Pastor at Highland Park Presbyterian Church in Dallas. Her son, Franklin, was the oldest of her 5 children, and she rightfully expected him to assist her with his 3 sisters and little brother, but Franklin chose to bully, aggravate, and needle them mercilessly, in spite of his mother's warnings. His perseverance in his rebellion, brought the promised reward for his actions, and Ruth snatched Franklin's hair, and led him out of the car to the trunk, which she proceeded to unlock and made him climb into it. She then drove on, with her four littlest and herself, enjoying the peace that Franklin's rebellion had denied them. An hour or so later, she stopped at a roadside hamburger joint to get lunch for her passengers. And good mother that she was, she didn't forget Franklin. But onlookers were aghast when she unlocked the trunk, took Franklin's order, and then shut the trunk again. A few minutes later, she returned, unlocked the trunk once more, gave Franklin his sack of food and drink, and drove off again with Franklin still in the trunk.

If Moses had had a trunk large enough, I suspect he would have done the same thing with the whining, complaining, and rebellious Hebrews. Unlike Ruth Graham, who had five kids to manage, Moses had at least a million - some scholars estimate the nation of Israel had grown to approximately three million people. He was leading them across the barren Sinai Peninsula to the fertile land of Canaan, the Promised Land, the land flowing with milk and honey. We live in Magnolia, Arkansas, along with about 12,000 other people. Memphis, Tennessee lies about 275 miles north east. Imagine what it would be like if you tried lead the entire population of Magnolia - on foot - one tenth of one percent of Moses' assignment-- to Memphis. You could tell them you are making a pilgrimage to a holy site, like Graceland. You've never been there, but you are taking God at his word. And of course none of the others have either, although that doesn't keep them from proclaiming themselves as experts on the geography and logistics required for such a trip. You have all the bologna that you can eat, and bottomless barrels of instant oatmeal. Three times a day, bologna and oatmeal. we had to eat was baloney sandwiches. Little wonder that tempers were short!

If you think a couple of hours in a car trunk is bad, Well, God did Ruth better. According to the Bible, he sent fire down from heaven and it singed the outskirts of their campsites. No one got burned, but it was a clear signal that God wanted his nation to behave. He knew the journey would be much more enjoyable if the Israelites would just trust him. The fire got their attention, but not for long.

You would think that after the firestorm and a few nights of indigestion from too much meat, the Israelites would have gotten the message: God does what he says he will do so that we can relax and enjoy his presence. When they were slaves in Egypt, they worked from dawn to dusk, were beaten if they didn't work hard enough, and, worst of all, felt completely abandoned by God. Consequently, he not only rescued them from their misery; he made his presence known to them in a tangible way. The cloud that hovered over the tabernacle was like a giant billboard that read, "I'm right here with you, and all you need to do is follow me and everything will be great!"

Still they complain.

Moses' own family members begin to question the whole "journey to the Promised Land" thing. Even though God had made it abundantly clear that his plan was to communicate to the Israelites through Moses, Aaron and Miriam- his brother and sister - aren't buying it. They grumble among themselves and come to the conclusion that God also spoke through them. This outburst is more than just a little sibling rivalry, because to God it again reveals a lack of trust. Not only did they challenge God's plan of choosing Moses to lead their nation; they must not have really believed that God was with them. If they had, they would not have dared to openly question God's wisdom. But he was with them, and he heard them and could not let such an act of rebellion go unnoticed.

He tells Moses to bring Miriam and Aaron to the tabernacle and meets the three of them there in the form of a great cylindrical cloud. God begins by declaring, "Listen to my words." It was God's way of letting them know that what he was about to say was extremely important, and I can only guess that it got

their attention as much as a burning bush would have. As they stand next to Moses, God continues:

"When there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"

Then God leaves, but not before inflicting Miriam with leprosy.

Aaron begs Moses to intervene with the Lord - clearly he got the message that God had a special relationship with Moses. Moses cries out to God for Miriam's healing, and God relents.

When we read about these incidents from a Lower Story perspective, it can be tempting to conclude that God is mean-spirited and enjoys punishing people. So what if Miriam and Aaron were a little jealous because God chose their brother as his leader and spokesman? What's the harm in grumbling about it to each other?

As it turns out, from the Upper Story view, plenty. God is building a special nation - one that is different from any other. One worthy of his presence. God's nation had to be different because it would reflect the very character of God to all others, attracting them to the one true God.

Such a nation could only succeed if the people placed their complete trust in this God, even when things did not make sense to them. For the Israelites, wandering in the wilderness with only manna to eat was not their idea of what it meant to be a chosen and blessed nation." Their Lower Story expectations got in the way of the Upper Story's development.

Can you relate? Maybe it's unemployment, a troubled marriage, a painful illness, a stress-inducing debt. The Israelites kept forgetting that God always keeps his promises. The land of milk and honey would be theirs, and while the journey might be long and difficult, he was right there with them along the way - just as he is right here with us in the midst of our own often difficult journeys.

Our life is like a road trip. God wants to lead us every step of the way. God sees the picture from the Upper Story and wants the best for us. He wants us to make it to our final destination. He wants us to enjoy the journey. But we have to trust him. When he says, "Left," we need to go left. When he says, "Right," we need to go right. When he says, "Stop," we need to halt dead in our tracks. When he urges, "Go faster," we need to put the pedal to the metal. When he implores, "Bust through the barrier, no matter how big and bad it looks," we need to charge ahead in faith -like a scene out of an old Incredible Hulk episode!

We also need to be reminded that whatever choice we make, there are others who are in the car with us. They will experience either the blessings of our good decisions or the pain of our destructive ones. God has a place of blessing to which he wants to take us. In this place, as we live our lives for him, we will also be a blessing to the people around us - as we serve them and allow them to share in God's blessings in our lives. As others see God working in our lives, they will want to follow God too. This will be the biggest blessing of all. But to get to this place, we must trust him.

So are we there yet?

No, not yet. But just sit back and enjoy the ride. Our heavenly Father knows exactly what he's doing, and he will keep his promise to be with us always.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Would you pray with me... Eternal God, we know that you care for all your people with love surpassing knowledge and would not willingly afflict any of your creatures with hardship or pain without a higher and nobler purpose in sight. So we ask that when suffering or hardship **are** our lot, you would grant us the strength and wisdom needed to endure and produce fruit pleasing to our Father as we grow in our understanding of Him and his purpose for us.

Preserve us from the insolence that flaunts the latest fad as a goal worthy of our pursuit, and from the despair that thinks what always has been is how it must always be. Save us from being unwise

enough to refuse the discipline which we ought to accept and from being too proud to ask for advice or too conceited to accept the guidance offered in love; from being too self-willed to endure rebuke; from foolishly disregarding the experience of those who are older and wiser than ourselves; and from the self-confidence that cannot believe that it can be wrong, and which can see no point of view but its own.

Make us wise enough to realize our own ignorance, and to recognize our own weakness. Help us to resist the things which we cannot resist by our own will. Focus us so that we may overcome the temptations which fascinate us. Strengthen us that we may break the habits which enslave us. Grant us the courage we need to say “No” to anything which invites us to cross the boundary between good and evil set forth in your word. Direct our actions, so that we may always work with diligence, act in honor, and live in kindness.

Endow us with patience and wisdom to wait upon you to act in your own good time, at the right time, knowing that when we do, we too will mount up with wings of eagles, our steps become light again, and our way clear. Then may we serve you with obedience and joy, in the manner of our Lord Jesus, 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, “God of Grace & God of Glory”, hymn #420 in our Hymnals.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION “God of Grace and God of Glory” *The Hymnal #420*

*THE BENEDICTION

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE “Go Now in Peace”

Go now in peace. Never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of everyday.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know He will guide you in all you do.
Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis