

Sunday, November 6th, 2016

PRELUDE "For All the Saints" - Vaughan-Williams/Cherwien

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP

"This Is the Day!" - Dan Dykema

The Choir

After the choir is finished, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

"Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Isaiah 25 and printed in our bulletins?"

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Isaiah 25)

O Lord, you are my God; I will praise your name;

For you have done wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure.

Therefore strong peoples will glorify you; ruthless nations will fear you.

You have been a refuge to the poor, a refuge to the needy in their distress;

A shelter from the rainstorm and a shade from the heat.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food,

A feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.

And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples;

He will remove the shroud that is spread over all nations;

He will swallow up death forever.

Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,

And the disgrace of his people he will take away.

It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God;

We have waited for him, so that he might save us.

Let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation;

For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Gracious God, your ways are not our ways, so we seek your truth. Let your word so become a part of us that our lives may be transformed and become worthy of the Good News we have received. During this time of seeking and listening, humble us so that you may lift us up; break us so that you may heal us and make us stronger in those broken places; show us our ignorance so that we may receive your wisdom. Prepare us to go, to speak, and to do in your name, making good use of every opportunity to share the Gospel with those in need of your all sufficient grace. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand and join in singing the hymn, "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken", number 446 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

"Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken"

The Hymnal #446

*CALL TO CONFESSION

When we are called saints the idea jars us, for we know that we are not saintly people. We are sinners, but we are sinners who have been claimed by Jesus Christ to be transformed by his grace into saints. Remembering who we are intended to be, let us confess our sins as we pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing at its conclusion for a moment of silent prayer so that we may find forgiveness, healing, and the power to be changed for the better. Let us pray...

*PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God, we confess that in our desire to fit into our modern culture, we have dismissed or discounted the gifts of our forebears, forgetting that gospel is ours because of their word and witness passed down through the ages. Remind us of the saints on whose foundation of faith we now build. Keep us mindful of the dedication and the sacrifice of those who prepared the way for us and help us to honor them and You with our actions. Amen.

*SILENT CONFESSION

(Pause for about 30 seconds of silence.)

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; behold, everything has

become new!... 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

We have been reconciled to the Father by the gift of his Son. Let us now be reconciled one with 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.

“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.”

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 preacher will return to the pulpit and say...

Several members of this congregation have moved from the church militant to the church triumphant this year. In addition, the church worldwide has lost some leading figures and they are included. Let us remember each of them and when the video concludes, let us give God thanks for their lives and for the lessons and gifts they imparted to each of us.

A THANKSGIVING FOR THE SAINTS

A Video & Prayer

After the video, the preacher will return to the pulpit and say...

Let us pray... God of life, we give you thanks for your loving saints across the centuries, who served Christ at high cost, and bequeathed to us a rich heritage. We give you thanks for all those people, so very dear to us, whose loving presence here on earth is no more, yet who live a larger life hidden in Christ. Especially do we thank you for Robyn Cotter,... Raymond Whitehead,... Jim Parham,... Sue Parham,... Cameron Dodson,... Mary Ann Freeland,... and Patsy Bentley. Grant them your peace and joy, and may light perpetual shine upon them.

O Lord our God, from whom neither life nor death can separate those who trust in your love, and whose gentle power holds in its embrace your children both in this world and the next, so unite us to yourself that, in fellowship with you, we may always be united with our love ones.

Give us courage, constancy and hope; through him who died and was buried and rose again for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen!

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

We have all been comforted and strengthened through the faith and witness of the saints who have gone before us in Christ’s service. The torch of Christ’s compassion has been passed to us. We are those who are to wipe away tears, offer hope’s embrace, and share our faith in Christ with the world. We do this through the offering of ourselves through our tithes and offerings. Let us give generously and gladly as we continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings.

THE OFFERTORY

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

"Now Thank We All Our God--Pastorale" - Kenneth T. Kosche

*DOXOLOGY

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.

*OFFERTORY PRAYER

Let us pray... God of all ages, we make this offering in gratitude for those who, in the name of Christ, have washed our feet, tended our wounds, broken our chains, fed and clothed us in spirit. And we dedicate ourselves to the continuing of Christ's work in this world, in grateful memory of these saints, and in loving

response to the needs of friend and stranger. 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 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.

THE ANTHEM "Shall We Gather at the River?" - Lowry/Carter/Courtney The Choir

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning begins at the seventh verse of the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation of John. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1085 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

And he who sat upon the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true." And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water of life without payment. He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son."

Our sermon text today is taken from the fifty-sixth Psalm, beginning at the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #495 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

Be gracious to me, O God, for men trample upon me; all day long foemen oppress me; my enemies trample upon me all day long, for many fight against me proudly.

When I am afraid, I put my trust in thee. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust without a fear. What can flesh do to me?

All day long they seek to injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil.

They band themselves together, they lurk, they watch my steps.

As they have waited for my life, so recompense them for their crime; in wrath cast down the peoples, O God!

Thou hast kept count of my tossings; put thou my tears in thy bottle! Are they not in thy book?

Then my enemies will be turned back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust without a fear. What can man do to me?

Leader: This is the Word of the Lord.

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"Tears in a Bottle"

When my mother passed away 30 years ago this week, I thought we, as a family, had had sufficient time over the last 4 years of her life to adjust to the idea of losing her to cancer. But when death finally came, the finality of it was almost overwhelming. I discovered what most of us discover-- grief is "an animal all of its own." It is a lesson that is simultaneously, both inherently personal and pervasively universal in its scope, and can only be learned by working through it.

On this All Saints Sunday, we remember those who have gone before us and all those who are still with us who are, most of whom are admittedly saints in only the **broadest** sense of the word. Not canonized

saints recognized for their miraculous documented deeds, but simply the company of the faithful who have lived their life in faith and now live eternally with God. It even includes those most unsaintly sinners around us, sitting next to us in the pews, or standing in the pulpit. It is miraculous when God creates the wonders of the universe from nothing, but I believe his greatest miracle is done when he turns us sinners into saints.

In a sacred place like this, amid brass plaques and colored glass, weathered wood and aging cushions, we know that many who have gone before us and many who are with us now, realize what it is to come to the church on All Saints Sunday and sense the closeness of those who are so far away and yet so dear in our hearts..., a great cloud of witnesses.

We remember today with fondness those who have been the lights of our lives and the joy of our homes, the parents and sisters and brothers, the children, husbands and wives, grandparents and friends; all those whom we have loved in this life and who have slipped from our arms into the strong arms of God, where they now dwell in God's nearer presence.

All three passages of scripture today bear a common theme, their reference to tears and what happens to them, because this is a Sunday when our hearts are heavy and tears are close.

The first of the lessons, are the words of Psalm 56; a plaintive appeal, "Be gracious to me, O God... O Most High, when I am afraid; I put my trust in you... You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle."

And there's an image for you, a God who keeps the tears we shed, saved in a bottle, as if none were lost, and all are treasured. It makes me think of the words to that wonderful old hymn, "There's a Wideness in God's Mercy," the verse that says, "There is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven; there is no place where earth's failings have such kindly judgment given." The psalmist wants us to know that even our tears are kept safe in God's keeping.

The second of the lessons today is from the Revelation of John, the book of the Bible that tells us how it all turns out, where everything is headed.

In today's reading, the promise is made that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. For death will be no more, and mourning and crying and pain will pass away.

So in the end, this God who has kept all our tears in a bottle, and who himself knows how to weep, will wipe the last of our tears away, for mourning and crying and pain will be no more. And this is the promise we celebrate today. Every tear, every face, every eye.

Of course our tears make us feel self-conscious, even childish. Women seem better at it than we men, because with the male of our species the shedding of tears inevitably invites the admonition, "Big boys don't cry." We men learn early the lesson of Shakespeare's Friar Lawrence to Romeo, "Thy tears are womanish." And were it not for the sexism of it, we might have bought the lie.

But each of us knows that tears reveal not a woman's or a man's emotion, but a human one, because tears come from the water that flows along the river of compassion whose headwaters are in the heart and whose rapids are in the eyes.

There are good things to be said of tears, you know. They cleanse the eye, they wash away the irritation, they unstop the bottle of sadness that needs to spill sometimes, because life does have sadness in it.

In fact, sometimes our tears say all there is to say.

I shall never forget a closed door conversation in another church office some years ago. Someone came in with a story to tell, something sad and heartfelt. I ushered him in, and after a few painfully quiet moments, I thought I should be steering our conversation to its purpose. "Was there something you wanted to talk about?"

And with that, I heard something about "doctor..." "my wife..." "someone..." "a man" "sorry..." A few words here and there, almost inaudible, disconnected, because what was really happening was weeping-- deep, gut wrenching, cathartic weeping. I had the good sense to do two things. One was to keep my mouth shut and listen and let this happen, whatever it was. The other was to have a fresh box of Kleenex on the table in front of him, which I pushed toward him.

This went on for about fifteen minutes. Him weeping, me sitting and watching, and feeling kind of

misty myself at the sadness he was feeling. Eventually, he kind of got himself together, squared his shoulders, took several deep breaths, apologized for falling apart on me like this, and shook my hand as he left.

About three days later I received a note from him, written in his own peculiar scrawl. "I shall never forget what you did." And for the life of me, I have no idea what I did other than to take him seriously, and to gather up his tears in the wadded up Kleenex.

And some people think tears are all a waste.

Children know about tears and the usefulness of them. There **are** some things in life worth crying about and they know it. The broken things, the things you've worked hardest to make. The things you most long to have, but cannot. The ones you least want to let go of, but must. The people you least want to hurt, but do.

They know about tears, the children do. And they know as well, instinctively-- or should-- the promise of God, who has kept every tear in a bottle, and who in the end will wipe away every tear from our eyes, not as a way of disposing of tears, but with the gentle hand of a parent who knows the soothing value of weeping, and what it is to grieve and let go.

Life is, after all, a series of gifts received and gifts given, until at last we return the final gift itself, our lives.

The promise is that God intends for us more than we have yet imagined, a reconciliation and a glad reunion for which our earthly tears are but a hint and a promise.

Fred Craddock tells a story of a family that lived in his neighborhood in Oklahoma. They had a daughter that was wild. "She was," as Craddock described her, "hanging off the backend of every Harley in town." She was arrested on some drug charges and sentenced to six months in jail. She was three months pregnant when she went into detention. She had her baby shortly before she was released, and the word got out that on Saturday she would be coming home from jail.

On Saturday, Fred says, everybody in the neighborhood was out working in their front yards. In fact, he spent most of the afternoon out there mowing his lawn and looking up the street at that house where the girl was coming home. He mowed his grass twice in neat perpendicular rows, before doing it a third time in diagonal rows, always keeping an eye up the street. About dusk his neighbor was down to scissors clipping single blades of grass, until at last that girl came home, and she had her baby in her arms and everybody in the family came out to welcome her, and they went inside and had a big meal and cake and a celebration. And she cried, and her dad cried, and her mother cried. Everybody was awash in tears that afternoon at her welcome home party.

Our tears, are not simply a lament for things past, but an expression of our longing for something yet to come, a future better seen by God than it is by us who know by faith that tears of loss anticipate reunion. Tears of pain bring with healing. Tears of friendship are the first expression of a lasting communion. For our tears are but a harbinger of what God would have us receive in the happiest of all endings, the one that John describes in the last of his Revelation.

All the tears on all the faces; God will wipe them all away so that we may see with utter clarity the vast inheritance God promises us with all the saints.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us pray... We thank you, God, for those who have blessed our lives in small, but significant ways; and for all the saints in heaven and on earth whose sacrificial service has moved closer your reign in this world. May the memory of those who have gone before us, inspire us and direct us in our witness and service so that we, our children, and our children's children may one day join the communion of all the saints in light. May the lamp of faith by which they walked, and then handed on to us, never be hidden under our load of worldly cares. Help us to treasure the light, to share it with those around us, and to pass it on to the generations yet to come.

As we come to your table Lord, we ask that you would pour out your Spirit upon these gifts of wine and bread that they may truly be for us the body and blood of our Lord Jesus. May they so remind us of the

enormity of His sacrifice for us, that we may gladly yield our lives and love to him, now and forever. Then may we follow in the steps of him and the saints who have led us thus far. Nurtured by the holy manna set before us, may we release our hold on the things of earth and grasp forever the gift of eternal, abundant life through 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

THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

The Invitation

Do not be concerned if you feel unworthy to receive His gift. Jesus came not to redeem the righteous, but to save sinners. It is for you that he gave his body and his blood that we might be fed upon the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation. Allow him to wrap you in his righteousness, to hide your sins beneath his own perfection, and then come. Come to eat your fill and drink deeply of his pardon, for this is his feast and you are invited, not because you are worthy, but because he loves you.

The Words of Institution

On the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord took bread, and after he had give thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying: "Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In like fashion after they had eaten, he took the cup. After he had given thanks he gave it to his disciples saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink ye all of it."

For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again in final victory.

The Distribution of the Elements

The Prayer After Receiving

Lord, we thank you for the foretaste of the heavenly banquet that we will one day share with all the saints in light. Thank you for filling us with joy and strengthening us for the tasks ahead through the meal we have shared at your table. We come before you, eternal God, not to be counted with those most noble saints and martyrs, but as those ordinary Christians who know that they have a wonderful Savior. By the enabling grace of Christ Jesus, please assist us to so worship you here, and to serve you in all our daily affairs, that in the hour of our death we may be gathered into that choir of the redeemed whose joy and praise never ends. Amen!

Would all who are able please stand and join in singing our closing hymn, "For All the Saints", #526 in *The Hymnal*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"For All the Saints"

The Hymnal #526

*THE BLESSING

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

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

Tune: Londonderry Air (O Danny Boy)

Psalms 139

O Lord, you know my laughing and my weeping.

You see my thoughts and deeds from every side.

Before my birth, my life was in your keeping.

I can't escape, no matter where I hide.

For if I flee from you, through joy or sorrow,

To heaven or hell, I find you waiting there;

Or ride the wings of morning till tomorrow,

Yes, even there, yes even there, I'm in your care.

*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis