

**Worship Service from First Presbyterian Church of Magnolia
Sunday, November 15, 2015**

The liturgist and pastor will meet in the hall outside the choir room a couple of minutes prior to the start of the service at 10:45am. The liturgist will enter followed by the pastor. The pastor will step into the pulpit, welcome everyone, and make announcements....

The preacher will then ask...

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

The preacher will take a seat.

PRELUDE "Lord of Light" - Charles Callahan Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "This Is the Day!" - Dan Dykema The Choir
After the Choral Call, the liturgist should step to the lectern and say,

“Would you join me in reading the responsive call to worship adapted from Psalm 16 and printed in our bulletins?”

CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 16)

The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot.

I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me.

I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure.

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit.

You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore.

Let us worship God beginning with prayer...

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

Let us pray... Loving God, we come to you out of a world that is often scary. We hear of wars and rumors of wars. We hear of earthquakes and troubles everywhere. It is frightening, Lord. We hear so many things about the future and we wonder if they are true. Help us in this time and place to be still, to be quiet and to listen for your voice, to become sensitive to your presence. Teach us, Good Lord, what we need to know. Remind us of who you are and who you have called us to be. Calm our fears and help us trust totally in you and your providential care, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Would all of you who are able please stand with me and join in singing our opening hymn, “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah”, number 281 in our *Hymnals*.

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

*HYMN OF PRAISE “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah” *The Hymnal #281*
After the hymn, the preacher will step into the pulpit and say...

***CALL TO CONFESSION**

We cannot undo all of the wrong we have done, but we can be cleansed from an evil conscience and made fit to serve Christ. Let us approach the throne of grace in all truth, confessing the deeds and distractions that have distanced us from God and divided us from others 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**

Holy God, we confess the hypocrisy and sin in our lives, the self-righteousness and pride that creep into our religious practice. In our preoccupation with the externals of religion we have neglected to

fully nurture our inner spiritual relationship with you. Forgive us for opening our lips, but not our hearts; for bending our knees without bending our wills; for wearing holy faces to cover up our unholy lives. Help us to worry less about the pretentious outer form of religion, and submit to the circumcision of our hearts by your Holy Spirit. Forgive and sanctify us so that our private intent may be as holy as our public practice. Amen.

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

*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON

With one sacrifice, God made perfect forever those who are purified from sin. And we, who have made our confession, may be assured that by Christ's one act of obedience, we are cleansed and considered without spot or stain. ...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 lectern and say,

“Let of of us who are able, stand and join in one voice to sing our next hymn, “Rock of Ages”, which is printed in our bulletins.

*HYMN OF PRAISE

“Rock of

Ages”

Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee;
Let the water and the blood, from thy wounded side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure; save from wrath and make me pure.

Not the labors of my hands can fulfill thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know, could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thou alone.

Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly; wash me, Savior, or I die.

While I draw this fleeting breath, when my eyes shall close in death,

When I soar to worlds unknown, see thee on thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee.

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

THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING

Be Seated. . . . We are encouraged to give as God has blessed us, bringing our offerings not to win God's favor but to thank Him for the favor we have already been shown. Let us encourage one another to love and good works 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

"Hymn to Joy" - Charles Callahan

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... O God, we acknowledge that it is by our love that Christ's love is known in the world, and it is through our deeds that Christ's deeds are shown. May these gifts we bring in love, be, for others, assurance of your concern for them, and inspire them to respond with loving and caring acts of their own to your glory. 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

"I Trust in the Lord" - Joseph M. Martin

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 Gospel of Mark, the thirteenth chapter beginning with the first verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #881 in your pew bibles.

Listen now for the word of God...

"And as he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!"

And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?"

And Jesus began to say to them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. Many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. And when you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places, there will be famines; this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs."

*The liturgist will take his/her seat. Or, if you prefer,
you may return to the congregation to sit with your family or friends.*

Thanks for your service.

+++++

The preacher will then return to the pulpit and say...

Our Gospel Reading this morning is taken from the Book of Hebrews, the tenth chapter, beginning with the eleventh verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #1049 in your pew bibles. Listen now for the word of God...

"And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet. For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

"And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: "I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,"

then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more."

"Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. Therefore, brethren, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way which he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."

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

People: Thanks be to God.

THE SERMON

"The Mystery of God's Judgement"

The gospel reading this morning at the beginning of chapter 13 in Mark is known as the Little Apocalypse.

The Apocalypse is an uncovering, a revealing, a series of events which signals the end of time as we know it... the end of the world as we know it.

During that time, it is written that the faithful will suffer terrible persecutions as evil strives to destroy all that is good; and at the end of that time evil itself will be totally destroyed.

The Apocalypse is a time of judgement-- a time that we all will undergo, whether we are in heaven or on earth, or even under the earth-- whether we are interceding for the faithful before the throne of God, or whether we are the ones being interceded for.

Since the senseless terrorist attacks of Friday in Paris--- and I mean senseless to rational men and women of faith, for whom the concept of a violent punishing God inflicting such nameless terror upon innocents is totally foreign. . . . my own view is that this is obviously not of God, but of his dark

and rebellious one time angel, who delights in bringing out the very worst in all of us Christian, Jew and ----- other.

The Apocalypse of Mark centers on the horror of the last days, days very much like these except that the violence will be even more widespread and indiscriminate than that of this weekend.

The very thought of it is frightening and intensely unpleasant, and I understand that we don't like to think about it, much less talk about the day when God will judge his creatures and call us to give account for our rebellion or even our lukewarm attitude toward the faith that could save us. Wars, earthquakes, persecutions, the end of things like churches and temples, the downfall of governments and civilizations-- it's all just too much to take in-- and we either don't believe it will happen - or we don't believe God would operate that way.

Will it happen?

Look around the world my friends-- it has been happening since the day the curtain in the temple was torn in two - it has been happening since the day the stone was rolled away to reveal the empty tomb.

We are living in the end times - in the time when the wheat is separated from the chaff - in the time when God's people are persecuted and harassed and killed, - in the time when all manner of evils are loose upon the face of earth, evils which has been intensifying from century to century as they struggle to quench the light of God.

The question is not - is the time of the end described in the scriptures real? - no sane person can doubt that if they have the eyes to see and the ears to hear - but whether or not God judges the peoples and sifts the nations in this fashion? whether or not it is God who permits the innocent to suffer as they wait the final day? and whether or not God will, in the end, erase evil from the world as totally as I erased the incorrect answers from my 1st grade arithmetic homework in my Big Chief tablet.

One of the great mysteries of God is the mystery of God's judgement.

How is it that the wicked prosper while the righteous suffer? How is that God's judgement is balanced with God's grace? And how is that God seems to use violence to bring to an end the ways of violence?

I have no doubt my that the history of our planet over the last two thousand years is a history of the approaching end of all things and I have no doubt about who the author of the violence and the horrors is -- nor should you! Evil my friends calls down it's own judgement upon itself. Those who hate, end up swallowing up themselves in hatred. Those who are greedy - consume their very selves as they seek for ever more than they have Those who are violent - perish by the very violence they unleash. The penalty of the sin, is built into the sin.

Like a giant sun whose light has gone out and which is collapsing into nothingness so the evil about us will come to an end - for nothing can come of nothing unless God wills it otherwise.

What we see about us-- the Christian faith mocked and scorned by the media; thousands of Christians being killed each year in places like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, ... India and the Far East... all for no reason other than they bear the name of Christ. Ethical codes of conduct witnessed to in the scriptures of the world's 3 great religions, accepted and established as virtues for thousands of years, have become the pet targets of our cultural icons and politicians and beautiful people who flaunt their violations of those ethical standards and encourage others to follow their lead, even as they label people of faith as haters and bigots. Horrors like those of Nazi Germany and Islamicism are loosed upon people of every race & creed with ever increasing callousness and frequency. Such things cannot be blamed upon God, but they can be seen to be used by God to accomplish his purpose.

Jesus says in today's reading from the Gospel of Mark after saying how the temple - the largest and most important edifice of the last age - will be destroyed and how there will be wars and rumors of wars and how nations will rise against nations and there will be famines and earthquakes that such things must happen, but the end is still to come, that such things are the beginning of birth pains.

What we see about us is the ending of the old world and the coming of a new one.

And there is not only mercy in the coming of the new world But there is a mercy in the length of time that it takes for the old world to cease for the old world to consume itself to make way for the new.

There is a mystery to God's judgement and part of that mystery is this - - that God permits evil to practice its arts upon the good - if it could not then none of us could be called free - and that while evil is doing its worst - God calls each and every one of us to change sides and to become citizens of the world that is to come - that world that he is bringing to birth in our midst.

Not long ago a friend shared a story, a parable if you will, about about the end times in which we live.

At the end of time, billions of people were scattered on a great plain before God's throne. Most shrank back from the brilliant light before them. But some groups near the front talked heatedly - not with cringing shame, but with belligerence. "Can God judge us? How can he know about suffering?" snapped a young brunette. She ripped open a sleeve to reveal a tattooed number from a Nazi concentration camp. "I've endured terror ... beatings...torture....death!"

In another camp a young black boy not more than twelve lowered his collar, "What about this?" he demanded, showing an ugly rope burn, "Lynched for no crime but being black!"

In another crowd, a pregnant schoolgirl with sullen eyes. "Why should I suffer?" she murmured. "It wasn't my fault." Far out across the plain were hundreds of such groups! Each had a complaint against God for the evil and suffering he permitted in his world. "How lucky God was to live in heaven", they said, "where all was sweetness and light, where there was no weeping or fear, no hunger or hatred! What does God know of all that humankind had been forced to endure in this world? God leads a pretty sheltered life", they said.

So each of these groups sent forth their leader, chosen because he had suffered the most-- a Jew, a Negro, a person from Hiroshima, a horribly deformed arthritic, a child with hideous birth defects. In the center of the plain they consulted with each other. At last they were ready to present their case. It was rather clever. Before God could be qualified to be their judge, he must endure what they had endured.

Their decision was that God should be sentenced to live on earth-- as a man! Let him be born a Jew. Let the legitimacy of his birth be doubted. Give him a work so difficult that even his family will think him out of his mind when he tries to do it. Let him be betrayed by his closest friends. Let him face false charges, be tried by a prejudiced jury and convicted by cowardly judge. Let him be tortured. At the last, let him see what it means to be terribly alone. Then let him die. Let him die so that there can be no doubt he died. Let there be a great host of witnesses to verify it. As each leader announced his portion of the sentence loud murmurs of approval went up from the throne of people assembled. When the last had finished pronouncing sentence there was a long silence..... No one moved.... For suddenly all realized that God had already served his sentence.

God has come among us - not to serve his sentence - for it is not he who has created the suffering in this world - but to serve ours - and to open to us the gates of heaven.

The mystery of God's judgement is found in the fact that he judges with great love, and while there will be a time when the wheat will be separate from the chaff, a time when that which has gone around will come around, a time when evil itself will be transformed into good, the good that is will be made perfect.

As the writing of the letter to Hebrew's concludes in today's reading: Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

That day is approaching-- ever & ever closer. Praise be to God for it.

THE PASTORAL PRAYER & THE LORD'S PRAYER

Almighty and merciful God, we thank you for keeping our souls and for opening the gate of heaven to all who call upon you. We thank you for your love that asks us to do our best and which lifts us up with warmth and encouragement when we fall. Be with us, in our hearts and in our minds, upon our lips and in actions of our hands, when we see the world around us falling apart. Help us remember that you are in charge of all things and that your hand has brought us safe thus far and that it will one day lead us home. Encourage us and help us to encourage others for the facing of the hour of trial.

Grant the tender touch of your Spirit upon those who dwell in fear or despair. Bless all those who struggle with a renewed vision of your kingdom come so that they may persevere through their trials. Pour out renewed strength upon the weak and shine upon all those who wait in darkness.

We pray, O Lord, for those who lead the nations of the earth that they may fight more effectively the war against terror and the evil done in your name. Grant them the courage and wisdom to do what must be done to remove the threat that hangs over all our heads, so that we may all live in peace. Remove their sinful pride that they may be willing to let you lead them and clear their sight so that they may recognize the enemy and with your help to destroy them utterly,, 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, "Blessed Assurance", #341 in our *Hymnals*.

*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"Blessed Assurance"

The Hymnal #341

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

*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

Tune: Londonderry Air (O Danny Boy)

Psalm 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