

Sunday, December 3rd, 2017

PRELUDE "Angels We Have Heard on High" - Anna Laura Page Dr. Elizabeth Davis

CHORAL CALL TO WORSHIP "Celebrate the Promise" - Joseph M. Martin 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 32 and printed in our bulletins?"

THE CALL TO WORSHIP

(adapted from Psalm 32)

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

**Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

When I declared not my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

**For day & night thy hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**

I acknowledged my sin to thee, and I did not hide my iniquity;

**I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord"; then thou didst forgive the guilt of my sin.**

Therefore let every one who is godly offer prayer to thee;

**At a time of distress, in the rush of great waters, they shall not reach him.**

Thou art a hiding place for me, thou preservest me from trouble;

**Thou dost encompass me with deliverance.**

Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous!

**Shout for joy, all you upright in heart!**

Let us worship God beginning today with the lighting of our first Advent Candle by the Arnold family...

**LIGHTING THE FIRST ADVENT CANDLE**

*The Arnolds should be seated at the front, near the Advent wreath. There will be a lighter on the wreath. As soon as they are introduced by the liturgist, they should step to the microphone, pick up the lighter, and begin reading.*

**Reader:** The Old Testament ends with the promise that before the Messiah would come, Elijah, the great prophet, would return and begin to turn people's hearts to God. This prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist, son of Zechariah and Elizabeth. Zechariah was a priest who served in the holy temple. In many ways, they had a long and good life. However, they had no children, and Zechariah and Elizabeth were still praying, as they had for many years, that God would graciously grant them a son.

**Reader:** One day, as Zechariah was performing his duties in the temple, an angel appeared to him, bringing a message from God. The angel said, "Your prayer has been heard." Sure enough, Elizabeth conceived and gave birth to a son, John the Baptist. John was just six months older than Jesus, and he was chosen by God to prepare the way for the coming of the Messiah.

**Reader:** Today we light the first candle of Advent, the candle of Hope, in memory of the angel's words to Zechariah, "Your prayer has been heard." May this candle remind us that God is listening to our prayers also.

**Reader:** 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.

*(Light one purple candle)*

**Reader:** Let us pray... God of all Hope, send into the darkness of our troubled world, the light of your Son. Touch the hearts and minds of all people with its bright beams of mercy and of truth so that we may prepare for our Messiah's coming. May your Hope, which is Christ Jesus, dwell and reign forever in our hearts. Amen.

*The Arnolds will return to their usual seats in the congregation.*

*As soon as the candlelighters are finished, the liturgist should introduce the hymn..*

Would all of you who are able please stand and join in singing our opening hymn, "Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus", #2 in our Hymnals.

*The liturgist should step back from the lectern for the singing of the hymn.*

\*HYMN OF PRAISE

"Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus"

*The Hymnal #2*

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

**\*CALL TO CONFESSION**

If you have shared in the world's sin, contributed to the brokenness of God's family, or succumbed to a temptations that led you away from God's will; God invites us to come and confess our sin so that He may deliver us from our iniquity and heal all our brokenness. Let us pray together the prayer of confession printed in our bulletins, pausing for a moment at its end for a period of silent prayer. Let us pray...

**\*PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Sovereign God, we confess our willful disobedience of your Word. We avoid writing it upon our hearts and minds because it makes demands on us we would prefer to escape and confronts us with truth we would rather not know. We prefer making promises to living by principles, and the only gifts we desire are those that come without responsibilities. We know that our ways don't work, but we fear making changes in our lives. Help us to hear and follow your voice, even when it convicts us of our sins, so that we may be transformed into faithful disciples and children of the light. May our obedience help others to overcome their fears and find in you the only source of light, warmth, and truth for our lives. Amen.

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

**\*THE ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

The Lord will have compassion on His servants and will make us glad for as many days as He has afflicted us. He longs to satisfy us in the morning with His steadfast love, so that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. 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**

All who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. Receive the peace of Christ and share it freely with one another. 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 prepared for them by Pastor Mike.”

*The liturgist will take a seat.*

**CHILDREN'S SERMON**

*(All Singing)*

“The Mirror”

***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.***

Bring in a cookie jar, filled with cookies. Ask the children if they have ever been caught with their hand in the cookie jar. Remind them that sometimes we think we can get away with something when nobody is looking. Pretend you are sneaking into the jar while you say, "We make our plans carefully, we check to make sure nobody sees us, and hooray!! ... We get away with it! But then ... we get caught." Ask the children if that has ever happened to them. Reflect on how it's hard to figure out how your mom or dad or whoever found out - you thought you were so smart. Tell them how King David broke God's rules, and he was sure he could get away with it - after all, who would confront the greatest king ever? But God knew what David did, and he sent the prophet Nathan to "catch" him. David admitted that he had sinned against the Lord. Conclude by saying that God helped David to see what he had done because God loved David so much that he couldn't let David get away with his dishonesty. So the next time you think you want a cookie, try asking for one. There's no need to steal! Give each child a cookie and close with prayer.

*As the children leave, the liturgist should step to the microphone and say...*

**THE INVITATION TO THE OFFERING**

This is a time for rededicating our lives to the purposes of God. Let us move away from longing

for what we do not have, to give thanks for all that has been entrusted to us by returning a portion of God's gifts to accomplish the work we have been given. Let us continue our worship with the presentation of our tithes and offerings...

*The liturgist will sit down until the Doxology begins to play.*

## THE OFFERTORY

Dr. Elizabeth Davis

**"Reflection on 'O Come, O Come, Emmanuel'" - Michael Ryan**

### \*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... Holy God, in the confidence that you will multiply our best efforts, we bring our offerings for the work of your church in the world. It is a joy to bring these gifts to you, for we are as blessed in our giving as we have been in receiving. Use our resources to gather all your children under your wings, where we may dwell together in safety and security, in mutual love and growing commitment to Christ, our Lord, in whose name we pray. 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.**

*Invite the congregation to... "Be seated," and take a seat.*

## THE ANTHEM

The Choir & contralto soloist, Jequetta Rogers

**"I Hear the Prophet Callin'" - Pepper Choplin**

*After the soloist finishes, the preacher will return to the pulpit & say...*

Each Sunday of Advent we are using a short video produced by "The Skit Guys" to help introduce the morning message. This morning we will hear part of the story of the Nativity from the perspective of Zechariah.

## AN ADVENT VIDEO

"Zechariah"

*After the video, the liturgist will return to the lectern & say...*

## SCRIPTURE READINGS

Our first lesson this morning is taken from selected verses of the first and second chapters of John's First Letter. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page 1065 of your pew bible.

"This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him is no darkness at all.

"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

"If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

"My little children, I am writing this to you so that you may not sin; but if any one does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the expiation for our sins, and not

for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.”

*The liturgist will take a seat on the chancel or with the congregation.*

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

Our second lesson this morning is taken from the Book of Second Samuel, the eleventh chapter, beginning at the twenty-sixth verse. You are encouraged to follow along and you can find the passage on page #273 in your pew bibles.

Listen once more for the word of God...

When the wife of Uri'ah heard that Uri'ah her husband was dead, she made lamentation for her husband. And when the mourning was over, David sent and brought her to his house, and she became his wife, and bore him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.

And the LORD sent Nathan to David. He came to him, and said to him, "There were two men in a certain city, the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had very many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb, which he had bought. And he brought it up, and it grew up with him and with his children; it used to eat of his morsel, and drink from his cup, and lie in his bosom, and it was like a daughter to him. Now there came a traveler to the rich man, and he was unwilling to take one of his own flock or herd to prepare for the wayfarer who had come to him, but he took the poor man's lamb, and prepared it for the man who had come to him."

Then David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity."

Nathan said to David, "You are the man.

L: This is the Word of the Lord.

**C: Our thanks be to God!**

THE SERMON

“A Broken Hallelujah”

After thirty years, David finally has it all. He has reason to sing non stop Hallelujahs! He sits on the throne of a unified Israel, the strongest nation in their world at that time. He has defeated all of Israel's enemies time after time. He has remembered his promise to Jonathan and brought his son Mephibosheth into his home and treated him like a son, showing a mercy and kindness unique to David.

The world is at peace and David is finally at peace in his palace. Hallelujah! He has come home for a long overdue and much needed rest. Hallelujah! But then, in the midst of his peace and rest, his attitude changes, and he lets down his guard. When he does, he makes one tragic choice after another that will devastate his own life, as well as as the lives of his most loyal supporters, and his own family.

David is beginning to suffer from a form of altitude sickness. Linger too long at high altitudes, and two of your senses suffer. Your hearing dulls. It's hard to hear people when you are higher than they. Voices grow distant. Sentences seem muffled. And when you are up there, your eyesight dims. It's hard to focus on people when you are so far above. They appear so small. They all look alike and seem so insignificant.

You don't hear them. You don't see them. You are above them. Which is exactly where David is. He has never been higher. The wave of his success crests at age fifty. Israel is expanding. The country is prospering. In two decades on the throne, he has distinguished himself as a warrior, musician, statesman, and king. His cabinet is strong, and his boundaries stretch for sixty thousand square miles. No defeats on the battlefield. No blemishes on his administration. Loved by the people. Served by the soldiers. Followed by the crowds. David is at an all-time high.

Quite a contrast to how we first found him in the Valley of Blah: kneeling at the brook, searching for five smooth stones. All others stood. The soldiers stood. Goliath stood. His brothers stood. The others were high; David was low, belly down in the lowest part of the valley. Never lower, yet never stronger.

Three decades later his situation is reversed. Never higher, yet never weaker. David stands at the highest point of his life, in the highest position in the kingdom, at the highest place in the city-on the balcony overlooking Jerusalem.

He should be with his men, at battle, astride his steed and against his foe. But he isn't. He is at home. And as he strolls on his balcony one night feasting on rich food and good wine, his eyes fall upon a woman as she bathes. He likes what he sees. So he asks about her. A servant returns with this information: "That woman is Bathsheba daughter of Eliam. She is the wife of Uriah the Hittite" Notice that the servant gives not only the woman's name, but her marital status and the name of her husband. Why tell David she is married if not to caution him? And why give the husband's name unless David is familiar with it?

The servant hopes to deftly dissuade the king. But David misses the hint. The next verse describes his first step down a greasy slope. "So David sent messengers to bring Bathsheba to him. When she came to him, he had sexual relations with her" (11:4 NCV).

David "sends" many times in this story. He *sends* Joab to battle (v.1). He *sends* the servant to inquire about Bathsheba (v. 3). He *sends* for Bathsheba to have her come to him (v. 4). When David learns of her pregnancy, he *sends* word to Joab (v. 6) to *send* Uriah back to Jerusalem. David *sends* him to Bathsheba to rest, but Uriah is too noble. David opts to *send* Uriah back to war with orders that are sure to result in his death. Thinking his cover-up is complete, David *sends* for Bathsheba and marries her (v. 27).

We don't like this sending, demanding David. We prefer the pastoring David, caring for the flock; the dashing David, hiding from Saul; the worshiping David, penning psalms. We aren't prepared for the David who has lost control of his self-control, who sins as he sends.

What has happened to him? Simple. Altitude sickness. He's been too high too long. The thin air has messed with his senses. He can't hear as he used to. He can't hear the warnings of the servant or the voice of his conscience. Nor can he hear his Lord.

Of course, who among us could ever ascend as high as David?

Who among us is a finger snap away from a rendezvous with anyone we choose? Presidents and senators and congressmen have such power and fall victim to it-- especially of late; we're lucky to send out for Chinese food. We don't have that kind of clout.

We can understand David's other struggles. His fear of Saul. Long stretches hiding in the wilderness. We've been there. But David high and mighty? David's balcony is one place we've never been.

Or have we?

We are all one temptation away from a fall like David's. Things aren't what they should be at home, and an attractive co worker who knows what you're going through smiles your way. The smile turns into a coffee or drinks after work. That turns into something else you never imagined, and suddenly you've taken a wrong turn, and travelled so far away from everything in your life that had once been so wonderful. You find yourself so lost, that you just **know** you'll never find home again.

So it is in the last verse of 2 Samuel 11 that a leading character is reintroduced to David's story: The verse reads: "The thing that David had done displeased the Lord" (v. 27). **God is back.**

David seduces-no mention of God. David plots-no mention of God. Uriah buried, Bathsheba married-no mention of God. God is not spoken to and does not speak. The first half of verse 27 lures the reader into a faux happy ending: Bathsheba 'became David's wife and gave birth to his son' (NCV). They decorate the nursery and pick names out of a magazine. Nine months pass. A son is born. And we conclude: David dodged a bullet. Angels dropped this story into the file marked "Boys will be boys." God turned a blind eye. Yet, just when we think so and David hopes so ... Someone steps from behind the curtain and takes center stage. "The thing that David had done displeased the LORD."

God will be silent no more. The name, not mentioned until the final verse of chapter 11, dominates chapter 12. David, the "sender," sits while God takes control.

God's voice was that of Nathan. And when David heard God speak through Nathan's parable, even though he was still light headed from life at the heights, he could still recognize truth. "YOU are the man!" declared the old prophet.

David's face pales. A bead of sweat forms on his forehead. He slinks back in his chair. He makes no defense. He utters no response. He has nothing to say. God, however, is just clearing his throat. God continues to speak through Nathan:

I made you king over Israel. I freed you from the fist of Saul. I gave you your master's daughter and other wives to have and to hold. I gave you both Israel and Judah. And if that hadn't been enough, I'd have gladly thrown in much more. So why have you treated the word of God with brazen contempt, doing this great evil? You murdered Uriah the Hittite, then took his wife as your wife. Worse, you killed him with an Ammonite sword! (12:7-9 MSG)

God's words reflect hurt, not hate; bewilderment, not belittlement.

Interesting. David sentenced the imaginary sheep stealer to death. God is more merciful. He put away David's sin. Rather than cover it up, he lifted it up and then put it away. "As far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him".

*Place your mistake before the judgment seat of God.*

*Let him condemn it, let him pardon it, and put it away.*

It took David a year. It took a surprise pregnancy; the death of a soldier, the persuasion of a preacher, the probing and pressing of God, but David's hard heart finally softened, and he confessed: "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:13).

And God did with the sin what he does with yours and mine-- he put it away.

Perhaps you are wondering why didn't he do that with King Saul? Saul sins, loses his throne....

King David sins, and is forgiven everything. Why the difference?

Saul chose concealment; David chose confession. The proverb is lived out:

"Whoever conceals their sins does not prosper, but the one who confesses and renounces them finds mercy." *Proverbs 28:13*

David not only confessed his sin; he confessed God's power to overcome his sin. This is an important part of confession. God's strength is strongest, when you are at your weakest. David covered up his sin but he knew there was only one who could cover his sin.

And so in his brokenness David would write,

"My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."

*Psalms 51:17*

Did you catch that? David doesn't offer another victory in battle or try to earn his way back into God's good graces. In fact this man after God's own heart offers exactly the opposite. He offers his brokenness in worship.

A year ago songwriter, Leonard Cohen, who penned the song, "Hallelujah", passed away. If you remember it, here are some of its lyrics as it retold part of David's story:

Your faith was strong but you needed proof  
You saw her bathing on the roof  
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you  
You had it all, you wanted more  
You paid the price, it left you poor  
With nothing but a broken hallelujah  
  
I did my best, it wasn't much  
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch  
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you.  
And even though it all went wrong  
I'll stand before the Lord of Song  
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah

The price tag on concealment is deceptively higher than that of confession. But even the price of confession does not compare to the price Jesus paid so you could find your way back to the heart of God. David found his way back to God through repentance, confession, and praise. You can too.

Assemble a meeting of three parties: you, God, and your memory. Place the mistake before the

judgment seat of God. Let him condemn it, let him pardon it, and let him put it away.

Maybe a broken hallelujah is *all* you have to offer today. God's message to you is, "It's *all* you need."

#### PASTORAL PRAYER

God of Grace. Lord of love. May your word bring its living water to seep down through our brokenness, into all the dry and brittle places of our lives. May it soften our hard hearts and pound the pride out of us that refuses to acknowledge our sins. Humble us until we know our need of you and believe with all our hearts that you, and only you can make things right again. Free our frozen tongues that we may confess all that we have done to hurt others and you. Then may we be restored and healed, with a new and right spirit put within us. May we kneel before you, grateful for a second chance to serve you and find our ultimate joy in your presence.

Let your blessing rest upon this bread and cup, our Father. Prepare us to receive them as indeed from the hands of your Son, and grant that remembering his death to save sinners no worse than ourselves, we sin ourselves no more but stand firm henceforth as faithful disciples of your Son, Jesus Christ, 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

##### The Words of Institution

The Lord Jesus, on the night of his arrest, took bread, and after giving thanks to God, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:

Take, eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way he took the cup, saying: This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the saving death of the risen Lord, until he comes.

##### The Distribution of the Elements

##### The Prayer After Receiving

Almighty and merciful God, as you have set apart these common elements to be uncommon, so set us apart that we may be used to bring about your kingdom on earth. If it be possible, breach now and forever the wall between us and yourself, and grant that we may gratefully receive your gift of grace and carry it forth into the world. Amen.

#### \*HYMN OF DEDICATION

"O Little Town of Bethlehem"

*The Hymnal #44*

#### \*THE BENEDICTION

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

#### \*CONGREGATIONAL RESPONSE

"Good Christian Men, Rejoice!"

Good Christian men, rejoice, with heart and soul and voice;  
Now ye need not fear the grave: Jesus Christ was born to save!  
Calls you one and calls you all, to gain His everlasting hall.  
Christ was born to save! Christ was born to save!

#### \*POSTLUDE

Dr. Elizabeth Davis