

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I include this page each week as an 'instruction page' for worship.

Attached is this weeks bulletin for your devotion and worship. It is consistent with the components of worship that John Calvin insisted must be present in Reformed worship.

It is my prayer and the prayer of your session that these worship and devotional aids will nourish you during this time that we cannot be together.

You will find these Components of Reformed Worship in bold:

**Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

The Invocation

The Word

**After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn*

The Sermon

The Affirmation of Faith

The Offering

**Read a psalm aloud as your offering to God. A suggestion is provided below.*

The Benediction

All of these components are on the insert. If you read through each in the order above, you will have moved through the rhythm of a traditional Reformed worship service. You should feel free to intersperse songs of praise, Psalm readings and personal prayer. Suggested places to do this are indicated at the asterisk (*) above.

Our prayer is that this will prove nourishing to your Spiritual health.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Alan

For your convenience, songs are recommended below:

What Wondrous Love is This — Hymn Number 257

My Faith Looks Up to Thee — Hymn Number 419

Dear FPC Saints,

Happy Easter! I heard from a few of you that last weeks Video Message on Facebook had a better audio quality than the week before. That's because I taped it in my office with my cell phone camera and microphone only a couple feet away. I plan to use that technique this week too but, I have to tell you, there are no guarantees! Last week it took about five tries to get the video uploaded. The problem is space on my phone and computer. Each video is running about 1.4 gigabytes and my equipment is kind of old. Well, I tell you that so you won't be surprised if that format is delayed or never shows up at all. Remember, you can always call the office and get the message in written form. I'll keep trying.

This week I put the entire Easter message on the bulletin. I pray you'll find it an encouraging message for Easter.

Please continue to pray for the wisdom and discernment for all of our leaders. As I said last week, there is no templet for the many decisions that need to be made during this outbreak. Our leaders will need all the support they can get and your prayers are always an encouragement to them.

My prayers are with each of you this Easter. Although we can gather together socially I hope enough of your family is together to enjoy the holiday. In addition to watching my own sermon each week, Carla and I have been enjoying the sermon from Burnt Store Presbyterian Church on Youtube and watch one of our favorite preacher, Bob Russell. Both can be found by searching Youtube.

Remember to stay in touch with one another and don't become too isolated! And, keep praying. I'll say again: God is listening for the concerns of His people! Be confident in His promises and Grace!

Peace and God's Blessings,

Pastor Alan

EASTER SUNDAY WORSHIP

In Service to our Lord | First Presbyterian Church | Arcadia, FL

Invocation

The Shema

(a declaration of the basic principle of Jewish belief, proclaiming the absolute unity of God.)

Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

(Deuteronomy 6:4-9)

Prayer of Confession

Be merciful to us, O God, for we have wandered from your ways and pursued the gods of this world. We are more concerned with position and success than with service and faithfulness. We are frightened by the storms of life and begin to lose heart, as if we had no one but ourselves on whom to rely. Have mercy on us, O God, and help us. In Jesus name. Amen.



HE HAS RISEN! HE HAS RISEN INDEED!

LOVING BEYOND ONESELF
(Tomorrow Love)

We know of course that Jesus was right in hindsight. You and I know that the promise Peter made to Jesus: "**Lord I will lay down my life for you**" was not a promise that Peter was destined to keep. It seems that Jesus knew Peter better than Peter knew himself. It's not that Peter didn't love the Lord; it's not that he didn't want to do what he said he would do; it's just that Peter, like like so many of us, lacked any assurance that there was really (I mean really!) anything beyond himself.

I heard a story about a boy flying a kite. The kite was so high that it had disappeared into the clouds. A man came by and asked, "why are you holding onto that string?" The boy answered "I've got a kite up there." The man looked up and said, "I don't see a kite", to which the boy replied, "Well, I know it's there because I can feel the tug."

In a similar way, Peter had not yet felt the 'tug' that assured him that there was really something there. In spite of the string that miraculously stood up into the air, in spite of the witness of Jesus' life and ministry, Peter failed to recognize the tug of God on his life. And that's why Peter couldn't understand what Jesus was saying. Because if you can't see beyond yourself, you will never understand the words of our Lord from today's Scripture.

Unfortunately, Peter's narrow-mindedness 2000 years ago is a narrow-mindedness which has grown to momentous proportions today.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe that “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him”. (John 3:16-17)

“For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God”. (John 3:20-21)

Benediction

Romans 12:9-10

HATE what is *evil*;
cling to what is *good*

BE devoted to one
another in *love*

HONOR one another
above *yourselves*

ROMANS 12:9-10

**Go now in peace,
and peace be with you all.**

In his book "Loving God", Chuck Colson says:

For at least a generation now our American society has been obsessed with the search for 'self'. We have turned the age old philosophical question about the meaning and purpose of life into a modern growth industry. Like Hines Ketchup, Coulson says, there are 57 varieties, and then some: bio feedback, yoga, creative consciousness, EST, awareness workshops, and Transcendental Meditation. Each a fad with an avid following until something new comes along.

Our current infatuation with 'self' was poignantly illustrated in a Washington Post interview with actor Shirley MacLaine, Ms MacLaine was quoted as saying: *"The most pleasurable journey you take is through yourself. The only sustaining love involvement is with yourself. When you look back on your life and try to figure out where you have been and where you're going; when you look at your work; your love affairs; your children; your pain; your happiness. When you examine all that closely, what you really find out, is that the only person you really (live with) is yourself."*

That, I suppose, is what made Peter afraid. When he saw Jesus arrested, he assumed he was on his own. When he saw the hatred the world brought to bear upon Jesus he could think only of self survival. When he began to envision the punishment that Jesus would endure he could think only of his own pain. When the reality of Jesus' circumstances became obvious to Peter he realized that he was not as sure about Jesus as he had been when he said, **"Lord, . . . I will lay down my life for you."** He was afraid of what tomorrow would bring!

During World War II the Germans forced many 12 and 13 year old boys into the Junior Gestapo. These boys were treated very harshly and given inhumane jobs to perform. When the war ended most had lost track of their families and so they wandered the streets without food or shelter. As part of an aid program to post war Germany many of these youth were rounded up and placed in tent cities with doctors and psychologists who worked with the boys in an attempt to restore their mental and physical health.

Soon after the tent cities were established they found that many of the boys would awaken in the middle of the night screaming in terror. One doctor had an idea for handling that fear. After feeding the boys a large meal he put them to bed with a piece of bread in their hands which they were told to save until morning. After that, he discovered that the boys slept soundly. After so many years of hunger, they finally had the assurance of food for the next day.

We are in an immediate gratification society. We are not nearly as interested in the 'next day' as we are interested in "right now". Jesus said, **"Where I am going you cannot follow me now; but you will follow me afterwards."**

You see that's the kind of assurance Peter was lacking. He had plenty of "at-the-moment" assurance. That's why he could say to Jesus, **"Lord . . . I will lay down my life for you."** But Peter lacked next-day assurance, he lacked tomorrow assurance. Peter lacked the assurance to look up and know that there was something beyond the string. He lacked the assurance to know that someone could love him other than himself. Peter lacked the kind of assurance that makes decisions that are reliable, the kind that allows us to know that there is something and someone who cares for us as much as we care for ourselves.

That's the kind of assurance Jesus wanted the disciples to have. It's the kind he wants you and me to have as well. He wants us to have 'tomorrow assurance'. And so he says to his followers, **"Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward."**

That almost seems too simple doesn't it? It seems too simple to think that all we need is what I have called "tomorrow-assurance". But I don't think it's really simple at all.

In fact, I am convinced that the reason we accumulate all the wealth we possibly can is not because we expect our lives to be so different today - but because we think it will assure us of security for tomorrow. We want to go to bed at night with a piece of bread in our hands too.

Did you know that the most common complaint received by marriage counselors from wives is that their husbands never say 'I love you'.

From what she wrote I would say that was Shirley MacLaine's problem. She could never believe that anyone else loved her. Every expression of love she received she regarded as 'today-love' only. And when she could find no 'tomorrow-love', no sustaining love, no next-day assurance, she replace love with the only thing she had - "self". Of course, the problem is that self-fulfillment leads to self-absorption, and self-absorption leads to isolation, and isolation, lead her to say: *"What you really find out is that the only person you really live with is yourself."*

Jesus was saying something totally different. At first, Peter couldn't understand it. At first, we don't understand it. Jesus says two things: First, he says God loves you with 'tomorrow-love'. That means that the love God has promised us is not only present but sustaining. In Psalm 55 the Bible says **"Cast your burden on the Lord, and he will sustain you."** And, the most familiar passage, in all of scripture, is not only about God's love but it is also about God's 'tomorrow-love': **"For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but have everlasting life."**

That's a promise that goes beyond today and provides security for the future. It allows us to be free from self-absorption and, more importantly, free to do as God commands today - without concern for our security tomorrow. Regardless of what happens today, good or bad, God is there for us tomorrow. And you don't have to see the kite below the clouds to know it. In the letter to the Hebrews it says: **"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."** If you will receive the assurance of our faith; if you know that God's promises are true; if you can see 'tomorrow-love' in the words of Jesus - that is like having a piece of bread in your hand tonight, so you can sleep through the night, knowing that your hunger will be satisfied tomorrow.

Then you can forget the idea that the only one who loves you is yourself! You can avoid that slippery slope from self-absorption into self-isolation. God's tomorrow-love gives us the strength and the

possibility of being people who can love others today. Because we know that God will love us tomorrow.

Which leads to the second thing Jesus said: ***“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”***

You see, once we are secure in our own love; once we know that God is with us today and tomorrow and the next day; once we realize that God is with us in both good and bad circumstances; once we hold him in our hearts with security like those children help bread in their hands; and, once we can see God clearly, in spite of the obstacles that stand in the way, then, and only then, are we ready to Love Beyond Ourselves.

Jesus says: ***“Just as I have loved you, you should love one another.”*** You all know the words that have been used to describe Jesus is love for us: sacrificial, unconditional and perfect.

Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach is quoted as saying: *“People need more love than they deserve.”*

That is certainly the way that Jesus has loved us - more than we deserve. And Jesus instructs us to love one another just as he has loved us! That's probably more than we deserve of one another as well. It is nevertheless, His command.

When I was growing up my grandfather worked for the Connecticut State Hospital at the psychiatric unit. The hospital campus was so large that they had their own power plant and Gramps was one of the plant operators. I remember on a few occasions Gramps would take me to work with him and I would get to see the giant boilers. They were loud, they were big, and they were fiery. My grandfather and I would make the rounds every hour to check the level of water in the boilers. Those giant boilers operated so hot that it was impossible to get close enough to look inside the boiler to see how much water it contained. So instead, there were tiny glass tubes that ran up the outside of the boilers and served as gauges. As the water stands in the little glass tube, so it stands in the boiler. When the tube is half full the boiler is half full and if the tube is empty, so is the boiler.

When Jesus says to us: ***Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another***, He gives us a gauge for measuring our love for God. The gauge is not invisible. It stands out where it can be clearly seen. And by it, others see the visible sign of our love for God. And they also see in it, we hope, evidence of God's love in us. Jesus said, ***“By this they will know that you are my disciples.”***

As our love stands for our brothers and sisters, so stands the measure of our love for God. If our love for others is half-hearted, then too, is our love for God. If our love for others is seen as full of the compassion Christ has shown for us, then too, the love of God is seen the same way.

You see, here is the really interesting thing about Jesus's words to the disciples: To ***“love one another”*** was not a new commandment at all! We can find it in Leviticus 19:18. There it says, ***“You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself . . .”***. However, to love others as much as Christ has loved us, that was new! That was revolutionary! You see, the scripture also says, ***“No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friend.”*** (John 15:13) To love in that way, to love in a sacrificial way, to love in a perfect way, to love in an unconditional way — that, is to love “in Christ's way”!

To love “in Christ's way” is new. It is the New Commandment that Christ has given us. It requires that we have the same confidence in Jesus as He had in the Father: Love beyond the moment, love

with the assurance of God's promises, love that can see beyond tomorrow, love that is Beyond Oneself!

Jesus had it. Jesus knew it. Jesus went to the cross knowing that Easter was coming. Can you live your life like you know that Easter is coming.

I hope so! Because, its here.

Happy Easter!

Let us Pray: Merciful God, we acknowledge today, with the whole body of Christ, that your Son is Risen. He is Risen Indeed. Grant that we may follow his example and his commandment to love one another. Grant also, that through our witness of love, the world may come to know you. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**