

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Pastor Alan Adams
20 N Orange Ave
Arcadia, FL 34266
863.494.4434
office@firstpc.church



April 23, 2020

Dear Friends in Christ,

It is not easy being away from each other as long as we have but it is a responsible thing to do under our current circumstances. We continue to live under restrictions that involve keeping a six foot distance from one another, using a face mask and restricting any gatherings to under ten people. Particularly since the majority of our congregation falls into the 'at risk' category, it is important that we act in the safest manner possible.

With this in mind, we looked to our presbytery and its churches to see what actions they were taking. The presbytery office staff are working from home 'until further notice' and, after setting 'return dates' a couple times, many churches have now chosen the same course of action. After consideration, your session has also decided to postpone worship 'until further notice'. We will continue to monitor the situation so that we can resume normal worship practices as soon as safely possible.

In the meantime, your session has been contacting members to see how everyone is doing and to be sure you are receiving our worship materials. I hope you have been able to listen to the weekly message audibly (on our Web Page), or in a video format (on our Facebook Page) or are receiving it in a hard copy either through the mail or on email. If you have not received the worship resources by one or more of these methods, please let a session member know so we can find a way to get it to you.

Please, please, please, don't allow yourself to become too isolated. Your church has a number of dedicated people willing to help out where a need arises. In the book of Galatians the Bible says, *bear one another burdens and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ*. Helping brothers and sisters in Christ, when help is needed, is a Calling given to every Christian. So, please don't hesitate to alert us if you have a need!

I pray that each one of you is well and getting through these strange times safely. We hope to resume worship as soon as safely possible and will be in touch as soon as we know.

Peace and God's
Blessings,

Pastor
Alan

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 the five Components of Reformed Worship in bold:

**Open with a moment of personal Prayer*

1. The Invocation (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

2. The Word (you will need to read the scripture cited on the top left of the first page)

**After reading the scripture sing a hymn or sing along with a hymn (Hymn suggestions below)*

3. The Confession (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

4. The Sermon

The Affirmation of Faith (Along the left side of the Bulletin)

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

5. 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:

To God Be the Glory — Hymn Number

Come, Christians, Join to Sing — Hymn Number

Blessed Assurance — Hymn Number

As a Psalm suggest, read the rest of Psalm 116. A portion of which was used as our Invocation.

P.S. Note that the Affirmation of Faith is not one of Calvin's components of Reformed Worship. Nevertheless, I have included it because it has become a standard part of the worship in the Presbyterian Tradition.

Dear FPC Saints,

As we approach the last week of April we are disappointed that the 26th may not be our last Sunday apart. Your session has re-set the date to come back together twice now and I, personally, am always discouraged when that date comes and goes without the ability to come together. Nevertheless, I believe your session and our governmental leaders are doing their best to keep us safe under unusual circumstances. Earlier this week you received a letter from me about our newest decision. Your session has decided that rather than set another date we will postpone worship “until further notice”. What I want you to know is that we are all anxious and desire to worship together again. So, please, rest assured that we will not tarry in our decision to reopen as soon as we can do it safely. Until then, resolve to *keep the faith under all circumstances*.

Again this week, I have put the entire message with the bulletin so we don't have to print separate copies. I pray you'll find it an encouraging message and a good way to stay 'Biblically Connected'.

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.

I continue to ask that you stay in touch with brothers and sisters in Christ. Use this time to visit the Web Pages and Facebook page of other churches in our presbytery to listen to their messages as well. And, of course, Youtube is another source of Presbyterian worship.

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

Peace and God's Blessings,

Pastor Alan

SUNDAY WORSHIP

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

Invocation

Psalm 31:1-5 & 16

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me. Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me. You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for you name's sake lead me and guide me, take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge. Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God. — Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word and deed - by what we have done, and what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart and mind and strength; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. In your mercy, forgive what we have been, help us to amend what we are, and direct what we shall be, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

(take a moment for personal, silent confession).



I AM THE WAY, THE TRUTH
AND THE LIFE

All Ways Are Not Equal

Pastor Alan Adams

I'm certain you've heard the saying that "When everything is important, nothing is important." You could just as easily say that "when everything is familiar, nothing is familiar." Well, I couldn't help but notice that I have begun each of my last few messages by referring to our passage of scripture as "one of the most familiar in the Bible".

Of course, this passage does enjoy that distinction. But it is different from the others for two reasons: First, because this is the passage that is most often used at funerals. Who has attended even a few funerals, without hearing this passage read:

"Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

You can easily see why this is the perfect passage for a funeral. The words are reassuring, they reinforce the promise of eternal life, and they suggest God is ready and waiting for us and has even made some provision for us. In our earthly world, there is only so much 'room at the top'. We are

Affirmation of Faith

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and every tongue confess to the glory of God: Jesus Christ is Lord. Amen.

(Philippians 2:5-11)

Benediction

1 Timothy 1:17

about to make.

I hope you follow this carefully,

Jesus has just told them that Now he says, **“And you know**

Talk about a set up! Do you are wondering where Jesus's there before; in their minds, Jesus, **“Lord, we do not know your father lives.”** **How can**

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

accustomed to struggling all our lives for position, for power and for security. As someone once said, “You can't have all chiefs and no Indians.”

But here in this passage, Jesus promises that the struggle is over and a place is already reserved with your name on it! We are led to believe (and not accidentally) that God has plenty of room, there is a place waiting for us, and that Jesus is going ahead so that it will be all ready and prepared when you get there. In this one short verse the fear of death is overcome, and we (and the disciples) are to recognize a God who is ready and willing to welcome us home.

I also want you to notice something else about these first few familiar verses. Particularly, the words, **“Don't let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me . . .”** In the Bible, those words are in the present tense. That means Jesus is not just telling his disciples that there is some pie-in-the-sky, future time, when they will be in the presence of God and things are going to be all right. No, Jesus is telling them that right now, as you stand here, you are already in the presence of God, and things are already all right. When we think of this as a “funeral text” in terms of the promise of eternal life it makes perfect sense, and it is very comforting. But when we think of it as a “present tense” text, something else happens, and it demands our immediate response. He demands a response on our “here and now” lives! And that brings me to the Second reason that this text is so familiar.

The beginning was familiar because it was a funeral text that we hear all the time. But the rest is familiar because it is so controversial. One might refer to this text as the “exclusive claim of the Christian faith.” And, when the paragraph is looked at in its entirety, you will see that the “funeral text” portion is just a prelude to the radical claim that Jesus is

because what happens next in this text is brilliant!

he is going to prepare a place for them in his Father's house. **the way to the place where I am going.”**

know what these disciples are wondering at this point? They father lives; they are trying to recall if they have ever been they are thinking of a place like ‘Arcadia, Florida’. They say to **where you are going.** (In other words, ‘we don't know where **we know the way?”**

Jesus has them right where he wants them. He has set them up to deliver the most important (and the most controversial) message of his ministry. If you look closely, you will see that this pattern of leading the disciples to ask ‘just the right

question' is repeated twice between verses four and nine.

The pattern goes like this: First, Jesus makes a statement of fact that they don't yet understand. For instance, in verse 4 Jesus says, **you know the way**, and in verse 7 he says, **you know the Father and have seen him**. Then the disciples express their lack of understanding and their doubt, for instance, in verse 5, **How can we know the way**, and verse 8, **show us the Father** (for we have not seen him).

That's the set up! Jesus has them right where he wants them. Now he responds with explicit answers. (This is where the exclusive claims of the Christian faith come in.) Here are the two answers that Jesus wanted to give - the answers for which He has crafted this moment. Here also, is the message and purpose of this whole discourse. This is the exclusive claim of our faith, and it is the reason that this passage is so familiar and so controversial:

In response to the disciples saying, "We don't know the way", Jesus responds, "**I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.**" In other words, if you want that room that has been prepared for you in the 'here after', you find it by following Jesus in the 'here and now'! And then, just to put the icing on the cake, Jesus says *there is no other way*.

This is where, I think, we often get confused. We have a misguided confidence in our ability to take the right path through life. We have never been here before, we don't know where we are going, but we act like we know the way. And, if you already know the way, why do you need Jesus?

Anyone who has spent much time in the wilderness, knows how fool-hearty it is to pretend you know where you are going.

There is a story of the traveler who engaged a guide to take him across the desert. When the two of them arrived at the edge of the desert, the traveler looked ahead and saw before him only trackless sand, without path or marker of any kind. A little concerned, the traveler turned to his guide and asked, "Where is the road?" to which the guide replied, "I am the road".

That's what Jesus is saying here. When you look forward with an eye toward heaven, there are no tracks, no paths, and no signs. The only sure way to arrive safely is to follow the One who has been before. Follow the One who has gone ahead and prepared a place for you. Follow the One who will come again and take you with him! If you're trying to cross the unknown, you must rely on someone who knows the way.

How can we be sure that Jesus knows the way? His second response to the disciples is the most critical. It explains his knowledge and his ability to guide us. In response to the disciples' request to "**show us the Father**", Jesus says, (verse 9) "**Whoever has seen me has seen the Father**". In other words, Jesus says to his disciples, 'Come on now! Have I been with you all this time and you have not figured it out? Let me be plain: "**I am in the Father and the Father is in Me!**" In other words, "**I am God!**" This is the radical, controversial claim, which distinguishes our Christian faith from all other religious claims. But (and listen to this carefully— it is not optional), because *only* God can offer what Jesus offers in this passage, *only* God can promise you a place in the heavenly kingdom. *Only* God knows the way across the great divide and has been there, and back again, and can lead us across the pathless unknown.

That is the point of this entire message in this scripture: that Jesus is the *only One* who has the credentials to make the claims that we find in the so-called 'funeral text' at the beginning of this passage.

If Jesus is not who he says he is — then the promise is useless.

If Jesus is not who he says he is — then the comfort is gone.

If Jesus is not who he says he is — then our future (and present) is random and directionless.

If Jesus is not who he says he is — then he could not have raised from the dead to bring us eternal life.

And that is precisely why the apostle Paul wrote: ***“If Christ did not raise, then our faith is in vain and we are to be most pitied among all people.”***

Too often we try to reduce Jesus to the status of a great moral teacher, but it is his claim of divinity that makes his promises both possible and plausible. It is his divinity that assures us that he has the authority to make such radical claims about himself and about our salvation. And it is his divinity that separates Jesus from every other attempt to claim knowledge of God's intention for us.

Let me end with a quote from CS Lewis, who put this dilemma this way in his book Mere Christianity:

I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Jesus, which is: “I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.” That (says Lewis) is the one thing that we must not say. He goes on to explain, A man who is merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg. . . . You can shut Jesus up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. So, let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

When you know who Jesus is, and look at all the promises and claims he makes in the Bible, one quickly realizes, that All Ways Are Not Equal!

Let us pray:

Lord, Jesus, we are comforted by the promises you make and by the knowledge that you are the One who has the authority to make them to us. Give us the wisdom to see the great love that is expressed by your coming among us, humbling yourself to our station, so that we might be sure and confident in the promises you make, both now and forever. Amen.