

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

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

Attached is the 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:

Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty — Hymn Number 136

Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us — Hymn Number 440

A Psalm suggestion: read Psalm 8.

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,

It is already May and I can't believe the time has gone so quickly! I thought the quarantine made things seem slower but, as the end of my time among you draws near, it seems to have passed too quickly. Officially, my last day at Arcadia is May 15th. That would mean that next weeks sermon would be my last. On May 17th your new Executive Presbyter, the Reverend Melana Scruggs, is scheduled to fill the pulpit.

A number of you have stopped by to ask about my and Carla's plans so I thought I'd give you an update: For a good number of years, an old friend and I have taken an annual hike into the mountains. For us that usually meant the White Mountains of New Hampshire but due to restricted air travel, this year it will be into the Mountains of North Carolina at a place called Stone Mountain. I am driving and will leave around May 28th and return to Punta Gorda around June 9th. I have one commitment on Sunday, June 21, then, beginning on June 22, Carla and I will leave with our RV on a slow route to Bloomington, Indiana. Our plan is to be there by July 1st. On that date we have reserved a house in the Hoosier National Forest. During our stay we will be within short driving distance of our son, Joel, his wife, Yukari, and our granddaughter, Echo (2) and grandson, Amos (name not official since he hasn't been born yet). Also within an easily drivable distance will be our daughter, Abby, and grandson, Gauge (11). We have the house rented until August 31st, after which we will probably travel to Connecticut before returning to Florida.

I have scheduled a meeting with your session for next week so we can go over plans for First Arcadia. I'll make those plans part of next weeks letter to you.

As you know, we are all anxious to worship together again. Be assured that your session will begin service again as soon as we can do it safely and within the states advisories. 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 106:1-3, 17-21

O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good: for his steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the East and from the West, from the North and from the South. Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction. They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he sent out his Word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to all people.

Prayer of Confession

We come to you, O God, an unfaithful people. We have sinned against you and have done much that is evil in your sight. The shadows of sin dominate us, and our secret faults separate us from the light of your presence. Have mercy on us, O Lord; blot out our transgressions, forgive our iniquity, and remember our sins no more. Purge us and we will be clean, wash us and we will be purer or than new-fallen snow.



NOR DID
ANY LIKE
HIM - ARISE
AFTER HIM.

The Secret Scroll

(Adapted from a 1989 sermon on The Protestant Hour, by Rev. Dr. John Mulder)

What does one talk about after Easter? In reality Easter is a hard act to follow.

Traditionally, we talk about the ‘after-Easter-doubts’. We’ve done that with the doubting Thomas story, the ‘walk to Emmaus’ story and the stories of the ‘other disciples’ when they first encounter our risen Lord and couldn’t believe their eyes. Jesus, standing in the flesh, raise from the dead, is like a wake up call. A reminder of things he previously said; clues they didn’t quite get; hints that seemed to make no sense; or blatant statements that were simply too outrageous to take seriously.

After Easter, Jesus looms over every Christian’s heart and asks, “Now what do you believe?” Now that Easter is over and we settle back into regular patterns of living what is it about your life that will make others recognize you as a confessing Christian? In other words, what do you stand for?

The truth is, today the whole church is confused about what we stand for. Both within the church, and

Affirmation of Faith

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.

Benediction

May the Lord, our great Creator, bless you this day.

Give you peace and hope and courage along the way.

May you stay within God's keeping in your waking, in your sleeping; in your joy and in your weeping,

God be with you.

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

outside of it, people are asking implicitly and explicitly, Who are you? And what do you believe?"

It is here that the ancient story of King Josiah may provide some help and insight for us. After the reign of David, the people of Israel were divided by Civil War and were conquered by other nations. Gradually, they began to pick up the religious practices of their neighbors, and abandon their worship at Jerusalem, and their faith in God. Finally, after a succession of wars and many Kings, Josiah came to the throne.

Josiah began to repair the temple that had been destroyed. And, in the process of restoration, the workers found an old scroll containing the Torah: the law of God. They brought the scroll to Josiah, and when he read it, he tore his clothes and exclaimed (22:13): ***“great is the wrath of the Lord that is kindled against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book.”***

Josiah then consulted a prophetess named Hulda. She warned him of God's anger and judgment upon the people - but also promised God's blessing on Josiah because he repented. And so, Josiah gathered the elders and priests and prophets of the land and went to the house of the Lord. There he read the scroll to the people (The book of Kings describes the scene in these words):

“The king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to walk after the Lord and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and with all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book: and all the people joined in the Covenant.”

Josiah pursued a campaign to return Israel to the worship of God, and the author of the book of kings concludes at 23:25

"Before Josiah there was no king like him, who return to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might; nor did any like him arise after him."

Today, if we (like Josiah) re-discovered an old Presbyterian scroll, what would it say? What would we affirm? Let me suggest at least three central ideas. These are ideas at the heart of the Presbyterian reformation. These are ideas that informed and invigorated our church throughout the centuries. And these are ideas that can help us today in a continuing reformation of our church, our lives, and our world.

The **first** idea is *justification by faith*. This was the central affirmation of both Luther and Calvin as they read again the New Testament, and particularly the letters of Paul. Over and over again, our church has tried to emphasize the centrality of God's grace in Jesus Christ, which is given to us. It is a gift, and it brings us forgiveness and new life. It offers us the chance to move out of the darkness of our preoccupation with ourselves and into the light of God's love for us.

How easy it is for all of us to forget this in our own lives and the life of the church. We find it difficult to believe that there is indeed a God who loves as the Scripture says ***'even while we were still sinners'***. This is a God who forgives us not because of what we do or how good we are. This is a God who arrests us in the mist of our frenzied and frantic activity and says *"Stop! Stop trying to prove yourself! I love you."*

This is sometimes illustrated to us on Halloween nights when we, as children, venture out to collect the annual horde of candy from neighbors. I remember a time when I knocked at one door, and greeted an elderly man with the usual opening remark: "trick or treat." Only this time, he turn the tables on me. He responded, *"What kind of trick are you going to do for me?"* I had no choice but to confess, *"I don't know any tricks."* He laughed and replied, *"That's OK: I will give you a treat anyway."*

There it is! God doesn't ask us to do tricks. God doesn't ask us to prove ourselves. God's love comes to us as a treat, freely given without conditions and without our merit.

A **second** idea of our tradition, that we could find in an old Presbyterian scroll, is the authority of the Bible. Solo Scriptura", Latin for Scripture alone - was the great rallying cry of the Reformation. At its heart it was the affirmation of the Bible as the source of our knowledge of God's saving love. Luther and Calvin emphasize this to

set themselves over against the radicals and Mystic who claimed that direct experiences of God's grace were authoritative, and over against the Roman catholic church in its insistence upon an authoritative church. In our book of confessions, we confess that the church can, and at times has, erred. That is, we've made mistakes!

At its worst the Calvinist reverence for the Word of God as revealed in the Bible has turned the Bible into an idol, a "paper pope", as some have called it. Others have accused us of making the Bible into an icon: *"the least read - best seller - in America today"*.

But at its best, our Calvinist and Presbyterian heritage has held that the Bible continues to be the best source for guiding and forming our individual lives and the life of the church. At its best, our tradition has said that the Bible opens up new ways of understanding our Calling to be Christians.

Today there is a crying need for us to reaffirm the Bible as the source of Christian life.

- Against the radical relativism of our world, we need to proclaim the good news that the truth sets people free.
- Against the rampant secularism of our age, which allows everyone a different set of standards, we need to declare that all morals are not created equal.

In an interview I heard recently, a young woman captured the spirit of the modern quest: *"What I'm looking for, she announced, is an authority that will not oppress me."*

In the pages of scripture is that authority!: a power that will claim our lives and redirect them; an authority that will free us; and a Word of Truth that will give our lives direction and meaning.

And the **third** idea we find within that Presbyterians scroll will be an affirmation of the sovereignty of God. Throughout the centuries Presbyterians have been people who have stood before God's grace with a sense of awe and gratitude. This ethos (or Presbyterian mentality) has shaped our worship, which is dignified, if not sometimes to dry. But at the heart of our piety and worship is the recognition that God is a God to be revered and that we are not in control of our own lives and destiny's. The sovereignty of God has also been the theological basis for the Calvinist impulse toward social reform. The logic goes like this: if God is indeed the final ruler of all human history, then all laws and social institutions are merely human, and should be judged by transcendent standards of our Christian faith.

This was behind John Knox declaration to queen Mary: *"I must obey God, rather than man."*

God's sovereignty was also the inspiration for Calvinist preaching at the time of the American revolution and for those who opposed slavery in the 19th century. And more recently, it provides the foundation for the Calvinist opposition to apartheid in South Africa and many other challenges to injustice.

In one of the most beautiful passages in all his writings John Calvin captured his own sense of the sovereignty and majesty of God. His words have both an eloquent note of reassurance for us and also a compelling critique of our culture today:

"We are not our own," he wrote.

"Let not our reason nor our will sway our plans and deeds.

We are not our own:

*Let us not set our goals to seek what is good for us
according to the flesh.*

We are not our own:

Let us therefore forget ourselves and all that is ours.

Rather, — We belong to God,

Let us therefore live for him and die for him.

We belong to God.

Let his wisdom and will rule all our actions.

We belong to God.

*Let all the parts of our life then strive toward God
as our only lawful goal. "*

Justification by grace, the Bible as authority for Christian life, and the sovereignty of God. These three ideas have shaped who we have been. But more importantly they can help us recover who we are and who we can be in the future. Within the secret scroll of our Presbyterian tradition lies a rich resource for being Christian, for proclaiming good news of the unmerited grace of God and for reclaiming the 'Word of God and of Truth' revealed to us in Scripture. For exclaiming the sovereign reign of God, not only in our lives, but in our world! For we have received that which we also deliver onto the generations of those who follow us.

Our tradition calls us to a continuing reformation: a reformation of the church and the reformation of our lives. It asks us to be the witnesses of God in the mist of the competing claims for peoples allegiances and loyalties. This tradition summons us to here again the injunction of the apostle Paul:

"do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. "

There is a wonderful story about the constitutional convention that might be a parable for both our country and our church. At the end of the grueling negotiations that finally produced the constitution an elderly and exhausted Benjamin Franklin emerged from the meeting. A woman called to him, "Dr. Franklin what kind of government do we have? "

He replied, *"A Republic, if you can keep it."*

Today as you finish worship, imagine someone calling to you,
"What kind of church do we have? What kind of church do we have?
And how will you respond?"

Let us pray:

O Lord our God, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Help us to know the power of faith in those who have gone before us. Break through the hardness of our hearts and the distraction of our mind, and the every wind of doctrine that blows about our world and make us courageous in witnessing to the power of love that sustains us and gives us hope. This we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen