

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 bulletin you’ve been sent. 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:

Come Thou Long-Expected Jesus — Hymn Number 153

Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name — Hymn Number 711

A ‘Reading’ suggestion: Exodus 8:2-3.

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,

‘Officially’, this is my last Sunday at First Presbyterian Church, Arcadia. I say ‘officially’ because I will also be in the office the week of May 18 - 24 and June 8 - 14, and will provide the sermon and worship material for those weeks. This was decided at the session meeting this past Wednesday. This feels like a strange way to end a Call to a church but we are in strange times. Toward the end of June Carla and I are leaving for Indiana where we have rented a house close to our children. We won’t be back to Florida until sometime in the Fall. We will certainly be back to visit you when we can and we will keep you in our prayer and thoughts. Our year and four months (really, has it been that long!) have been an absolute blessing and we have cherished the the time we’ve had together.

Next Sunday your new Executive Presbyter, the Reverend Melana Scruggs, is scheduled to fill the pulpit. As I said, I’m back the following week and the Worship Team is working to fill the pulpit during the remaining Sundays. The Pastor Nominating Committee made a report to session and is diligently working to find your next pastor. I recognize that it is easy to become discouraged in these ‘in between’ times but remember to keep heart! Remember that you are not searching alone! God is working on the heart of your next pastor even as I write. I have shared with your session and the Committee on Ministry my belief that First, Arcadia, can have a vibrant future if you *keep your eye on the prize* (Philippians 3:14). Be praying for your PNC and session and don’t be tempted to take the easy-way-out but pray and search diligently for the pastor God is preparing. Look for someone who will be with you for a good number of years, is able to live among you in your community, and work with you to discover the ‘mission-of-God’ happening all around you.

When session met we all acknowledged our desire to worship together again. We even considered gathering this Sunday and sharing Communion. In the end, however, we felt that the responsible thing to do is to stay within the states advisories which ask us to stay at least 6 feet apart and not meet in groups of ten or more. Session will continue to monitor this situation as things change.

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 pages of other churches in our presbytery to listen to their messages as well.

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

Exodus 8:2-3

Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you all these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you,

Testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord. Amen.

Prayer of Confession

Almighty God, you have sent the Spirit of your Son into our hearts and freed us from bondage to sin. Give us grace to dedicate our freedom to your service, that we, and all people, may be brought to the glorious liberty of the children of God. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever and ever. Amen.

(take a moment for personal, silent confession).



FOR THE BREAD OF GOD IS THAT WHICH COMES DOWN FROM HEAVEN AND GIVES LIFE TO THE WORLD.

Bread from Heaven

To follow this passage one really needs to follow the story that has been developing over the past two chapters. The story really begins back when Jesus fed the crowd of 5000 people with only five loaves of bread and two fish. Afterwards, Jesus withdrew to the mountains alone. We are told that when evening came the disciples got into a boat and traveled across the sea of Galilee to the town of Capernaum without him. What the crowd doesn't know (but the disciples who were in the boat do) is that after dark Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee himself by walking on the water out to the disciples' boat. It is important for us to remember that only the disciples in the boat were witnesses to this well-known miracle.

So when Jesus arrives on the other side of the Sea of Galilee with the disciples it is no surprise to those who are there, since they were not present when the disciples left the distant shore. For all they knew, Jesus had gotten into the boat when the disciples boarded. So when Jesus landed in Capernaum no one there was surprised to see him. But the scripture we have read today begins from the perspective of the crowd that had not gone across the sea the night before but had stayed there until

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

You have been feed by the Spirit; walk now, where the Spirit leads.

You are united in hope; go now to share that hope.

You are commanded to love one another; go to love the world as Christ has loved you.

You have been given an abundant life; go to enjoy the blessings of God.

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

the next morning. Those people had seen the disciples leave the night before, and they knew that Jesus was not with them. The scripture leads us to believe that they did not know Jesus's whereabouts, so we can assume that they did not see Jesus walk off into the mountains or come down after dark to cross the sea. All they seem to know is that both the disciples and Jesus are gone. Since they did not see Jesus leave by boat, they must have assumed that he had gone by land around the northwestern shore. That would have been the shortest route by land, but it was by no means shorter, time wise, than a straight crossing by boat. Our scripture today tells us that *some boats from Tiberius came near, so, they themselves* (that is those who had been in the crowd during the miraculous feeding of 5000) *got into the boats and went to Capernaum looking for Jesus.*

There is no way that someone could walk around the mountainous shoreline of the Sea of Galilee faster than one could cross in a boat. So the expectation of the people, who had joined the boats from Tiberius, was to go to Capernaum and wait for Jesus to join his disciples. Then, verse 25 says: *“When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, ‘Rabbi, when did you come here?’”*

That's the set up. That is what we must know to understand the rest of the long passage we have read today. We must know that they have just come from the miraculous feeding of the 5000. We must know that only the disciples witnessed the intervening miracle when Jesus walked on water. We must know that the people were looking for Jesus (in all likelihood, because of the miracle they had witnessed). And, we must know, that they were surprised, and maybe even a bit suspicious, to find Jesus in Capernaum ahead of them.

With all that in mind, we need to imagine these “Jesus followers” as they got off the boat and noticed Jesus on the

shore. We can imagine that at first they did a “double take”, then looked at one another to see if they were crazy or if the others were seeing the same thing. We can imagine that curiosity set in, that amazement set in, and then suspicion set in— **“Rabbi, when did you come here?”** In other words, *“How did you get here before us? How is it possible that you arrived here before we did?”*

Now, I want you to look at Jesus’s answer to that question and apply it in light of everything else that has happened. Jesus answers, **“Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”**

Can you see what Jesus is getting at? Can you hear what must be going through his mind? The sign should have been enough! He fed 5000 people with only two fishes and five loaves and there were still 12 baskets left over.

Do you get it? There were not twelve baskets to begin with. Even if no one had eaten, there should not have been that much left. And yet, thousands ate! Jesus is saying, *“Didn't you hear me pray to God before I gave you that meal? Didn't you hear me ask my Father, in prayer, to feed us all? Didn't you see a mighty act of God right before your eyes? How can you wonder, how I got here? Do you not yet understand who I am? Do you not yet understand that **nothing is impossible for God!** Yet, **very truly I tell you, you are not looking for me because you saw signs.** If you were looking for me because you recognized the work of God, then you would not have asked, **‘When did you come here?’** You would have assumed that I just snapped my fingers and arrived, or that I was here all along (even though, I was also there!), or that I simply walked across the sea on top of the water. What is it going to take for you to understand? What will have to happen before you believe? You see, you are not acting like people who know and have seen God; instead, you are acting like people who can't see beyond your noses. All you can think about is your stomachs! All your effort is given to fulfilling your bodily needs.”*

After all of that, Jesus says, *“I've got news for you!” Even if you fulfill all of your bodily needs, you are still going to die. You pursue those needs as though they will save you; you chase after them as though they will solve all your problems; you crave them as though they have power to bring you peace! But, I've got news for you! They will not save you. They will not sustain you. They will not bring peace. You see, this world can never satisfy the longings of the human soul.”*

There is a character in Greek mythology called King Tantalus, who was punished in the underworld by being chained in a lake. The waters of the lake reached to his chin, but whenever he went down to satisfy his burning thirst the water would recede, so he couldn't get to it. Over his head were branches

laden with sumptuous fruit, but whenever he reached toward them to satisfy his hunger, they immediately withdrew. He became a symbol of utter frustration, and his name has been immortalized in the English word “tantalize”.

That, my friends, is the human condition—We are tantalized by a world that looks so appealing, so alluring, but can never satisfy! We are forever reaching for that which does not sustain or endure. Jesus is saying, *Don't reach for those things! Reach for things that will endure. Reach for things on which God has set His seal. Reach for that which is 'of God'!*

In today's scripture Jesus is screaming out, *Reach for me! “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. And here, you have seen me and yet do not believe.”*

You see, they didn't get it. The crowds that had seen the miraculous works of Jesus couldn't get their minds off the dinner table. The dinner table is a representation of all the things in this life that entice us; all the things that draw our attention away from Jesus; all the things that will feel good now, taste good now, be fun now, provide security now, solve the problems we have now, but will do nothing to provide for eternity.

Look at how Jesus responds to these people who can't see that which is right before their eyes. He says, *“Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness and they died. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread — will live forever!”*

Now, I want you to notice something. Jesus is referring to the food, the manna, that Moses provided for the people of Israel when they were wandering in the wilderness. Jesus says even the food that came from the great prophet Moses did not save the people – they all died! But, Jesus is not condemning Moses as a bad prophet. Moses was then, and is today, one of the most significant prophets of all time. Moses called on God and did wonderful things for the people. He led them out of bondage when they were enslaved; he provided for their hunger when they were lost in the wilderness; he led them to the promised land as God had promised. All wonderful accomplishments. All works according to God's plan. All ‘worldly’ (physical or temporal) provisions! Moses is not minimized one iota by Jesus yet Jesus says *all those people died.*

Here's the lesson we are to take from Jesus's words, friends: That's all any prophet can do. The next time someone asks you what you think of Confucius, Buddha, Mohammed, Joseph Smith, Isaiah, or Ezekiel, you answer, *“They were all great prophets, just like Moses.”* If they then ask, *“Is*

it then important that I follow Jesus?”, you can answer, “*Not in this life it isn't.*” They will all help you to live (in this life) according to God's Commandments (to some degree or other). They will all help you to focus on the spiritual realm. They will all bring some comfort and quality of life.

But Jesus is saying *I am not just another prophet. I am not just offering you the good life like the prophets promised. I am offering you eternal life, and that only I can provide!* Verse 51 says, “***I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever, and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.***”

You see, that's what upset the Jews. Verse 52 says, “***The Jews then disputed among themselves, saying, ‘How can this man give us his flesh to eat?’***” But Jesus answers *I'll tell you how. I live because of the Father, so whoever eats of me will live because of me. I am the bread that has come down from heaven. I am the manna that sustained the people in the wilderness.*

In other words, the connection between us and Christ must be of the closest possible kind—so close that the assimilation of the food we eat is not too strong a correlation to express it. The food we eat becomes our blood and flesh; it becomes our life, our nourishment, our sustenance, our very self. And it does so only by our eating of it; not by our talking of it; not by our looking at it and admiring it; and not by our dabbling or playing in it. It sustains us only when we consume it completely!

The metaphor of eating is one that reminds us that the acceptance of Christ is an act which each person must do for themselves. No one else can do it for us. We cannot be nourished by food eaten by someone else, and we cannot “force-feed” someone who does not wish to eat. The life of those who partake of the Bread from Heaven (that is, a life that has chosen to follow Christ) is a life that understands what the crowds missed and what the Jews were offended by—Jesus Christ is God's gift of eternal life to us.

The Cathedral of Milan is the second largest cathedral in the world and one of the most famous. There are three doorways entering the cathedral. Over each one there is an inscription which spans the arch over the doorway. Over the left one is carved a beautiful wreath of roses, and underneath it it says, “*All that which pleases - is but for a moment*”. Over the one on the right side is a sculpture of a cross and the words, “*All that which troubles us - is but for a moment.*” But underneath the great central entrance to the main aisle of the cathedral is the inscription, “*That only is important - which is eternal.*”

Friends, what is important in your life? What things will be a priority in your life? What do you want to leave behind for the next generation? Things for the moment, or things for eternity? Someone once asked Emily Post, "What is the correct procedure when one is invited to the White House and has a previous engagement?" She answered, *"An invitation to lunch or dine at the White House is a command, and automatically cancels any other engagement."*

Today, you have been invited to eat the Bread from Heaven...and I would suggest...that you cancel all other engagements!

Let us Pray:

Thank you, O God, for the gift from Heaven - the example and sacrifice of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. We are nourished by His body and sanctified by His blood. We know our sins are too heavy for us to carry and too real for us to hide. But, He has given us new life and has made us white-as-snow before our Father and our God. Amen.