

First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
Sunday, June 3, 2007
Sermon by Huw Christopher, Pastor

Scripture Readings: John 16:12-15

Romans 5:1-5

Sermon Title: “Living as the Children of God Filled with God’s Peace and Love”

Sermon Text: Romans 5:1-2: Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.

Beginning this evening fifteen young people, along with five adults from this congregation, will be participating this week in the Montreat Youth Conference. Next Sunday as they lead us in worship here we will have the opportunity to think with them about the theme of this year’s conference, “Turning the Page.”

As we think about turning the pages of history here in Marianna I am sure that last night, June 2, 2007 will be one of those nights that will go down in the history of this community. This will happen if for no other reason than for two events which did not even happen here in Marianna but which are directly related to the story of this community. The one that will receive the most attention and publicity occurred in Grand Junction, Colorado where the Chipola College Men’s

Baseball team ended a phenomenal athletic year for Chipola College by winning the JUCO World Series, thus giving to the College their first ever National Baseball Championship. This victory combines with four State championships this year, and the Women's Softball national championship last month.

The second event, which I am sure will receive far less attention in the media in this community, took place at Rocky Creek Presbyterian Church in Jefferson, South Carolina when Stephenie Maddox Hill was ordained as a Minister of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Stephenie in this way joins a long line of people raised in this congregation who have been ordained as Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I know that there are many of you have been here much longer than I have, and may be ready to correct me after this service but as far as I am aware Stephenie made history last night in being the first young lady raised in this congregation to be ordained in this way.

Last night Stephenie was ordained by a Commission from the Presbytery of New Harmony in South Carolina. In this way she also turned over a very significant page in her own life story. As she did so, the first question that she would have been asked was, "Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?" If this question sounds familiar it is because it was not some unique question thought up by the people of that Presbytery in South Carolina. It is the first question that is asked to all people as they turn over pages in their life stories as they come to be ordained or installed as Elders, Deacons or Ministers of Word and Sacrament throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

When we think about it the wording of this question is significant in the way in which it affirms the centrality of Jesus Christ for our faith as Christian men and women. This, of course, is very obvious. Our very name of Christian begins with

the name of Christ. As we affirm that we are Christians we are not saying simply that with 91% of the population of this country in a recent Newsweek poll “we believe in God.” (Newsweek March 30, 2007) We are affirming rather that we believe in God in a specific way, namely, the way in which God has chosen to reveal God’s self to this world in Jesus Christ.

The opening words of our familiar creeds may speak of God the Father Almighty, the maker of heaven and earth, but we remember that we have confidence to call the great Creator God, Father, only because Jesus has told us to do so. It is not as we look at the world of nature or the beauty and bounty of creation but only as we look at Jesus Christ that we have the assurance that the Creator God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and of all things visible and invisible, desires an intimate, loving relationship with us, and is concerned about us so that we can call upon him for protection as we will do later in the service as we sing that famous Navy Hymn. It is through the love that God has shown for the whole world and for each one of us in Jesus Christ that we can know that we do not need to live in fear of the Father Almighty but that we can have peace with God, as we live in the assurance that our sins are forgiven, and know that nothing can stand between us and a loving relationship with God.

As we listen to the words of Jesus to his disciples prior to his death he makes clear that the very reason that the Holy Spirit will be given to them is not for some new insights and esoteric reasons, but that they might personally come to appreciate even more the truth of all that he had spoken to them and done for them while he had been with them. Without Jesus Christ and all he has done the Holy Spirit would not be needed. Paul reminds us that what was true for those first disciples is true for us today. The love of God seen in Jesus Christ now has been made personal to each one of us as it has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. This, says Paul, is why our hope in God does not disappoint us.

That first question asked to Stephenie last night, and asked to all elders, deacons and Ministers of Word and Sacrament in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) reminds us of the centrality of Jesus Christ for our faith. On this Trinity Sunday as we come to this Table to remember him we come to see that we cannot fully appreciate who he is, and what it means for us to be the children of God, until through him we come to believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Today we come to this table and so respond to his invitation “to do this in remembrance of me” by saying in the words of our anthem, “I will remember Thee,” As we prepare to come to this table, let us affirm again all that remembering Jesus means to us as we affirm our faith today using one of the oldest and most universally used creeds of the Christian Church, the Nicene Creed. Let us stand and affirm our faith together using the ecumenical version of the creed as found on page 15 in the front of the Presbyterian Hymnal:

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen;
We believe one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father; though him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate. he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven, and is seated on the right hand of the Father. He will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer Hymn for the Protection of the Triune God No. 562
“Eternal Father, Strong to Save”

Melita