

# The Visitor

*First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 900 S. Ennis, Bryan, TX*

July 17, 2018

## Last Sunday's Sermon

Title: "Holy and Blameless"

Scriptures: Psalm 24; Ephesians 1:3-10; 2 Samuel 6:11-15; Mark 6:14-29

[Click Here to Listen to the Sermon](#)

Sometimes I come to this pulpit feeling like I'm being pulled in different directions. Part of that relates to memory. You may not remember what I said last week, but I do. That is especially true when I take a strong position. I did so last week. While I have no desire to repeat that message today, I will not back away from it either. The theological core of that sermon can be identified easily. After laying the groundwork I began to pull the message together with these words: *"Beware of bad assumptions. One false assumption deals with grace and accountability. Don't assume that God's loving nature means that God is therefore light on accountability."* Then I referred to 8 Hebrew scriptures that describe God as *"slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* Still, each of those scriptures, with one set of words or another, makes it equally clear that God punishes the guilty. Nothing in the New Testament suggests that God's nature has changed.

Perhaps you've figured it out already, but today I'm trapped by my own words, or perhaps I should say anchored to them. If you aren't quite there yet, I can point the way. These words come from the Psalm for the day, a Psalm of David to be specific: *Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? And who shall stand in his holy place? Those who have clean hands and pure hearts.* (24:3,4) Those words surely do pinch because who among us can claim to have clean hands and a pure heart. Things get more interesting still when the rest of today's lectionary readings are factored in.

Psalm 24 is paired with readings about two kings. The gospel text features one of them in Mark's account of John the Baptist's death. Murder by King Herod in a grotesque misuse of power would be more accurate. I have no qualms about condemning Herod. Even without another word, I would tell you that he clearly had neither clean hands nor a pure heart. The other lectionary text features a story about King David. That one leaves me feeling particularly unsettled. I'm not sure that even David himself would have been able to give an honest and unbiased accounting of his actions that day.

The story involved the Ark of the Covenant, in which David was moving the Ark from the city he had taken from the Jebusites, to Jerusalem, which he held as his own personal possession and had become his seat of power. The effort was put on hold when one of David's men died after touching the ark. In today's first reading the Ark relocation project resumes, but that only deepens our reasons for suspecting David's motives. What got David back on task? Only this: Obed Edom, the man in whose care the ark had been left, was richly blessed while the vessel of God's presence had been in his keeping. I'd say David wanted that for himself.

Other questions rise. Specifically, David's ecstatic dancing. Enthusiastic worship is one thing, but just how far does one go? Turning back to the text, we are told that he wore a linen ephod. That's what the NIV and NRSV call it: some sort of robe we might presume. The issue gets a bit clearer if you read the Common English Bible. It describes that linen ephod as a "priestly vest." Not to be too pointed, but a vest is a waist length garment. If you are thinking, 'surely he had something else on', just skip down to verse 20. Michal, one of

David's wives, and also King Saul's daughter, complained bitterly that David had "*disrobed in front of the slave girls.*" (6:20) And if you are wondering, why the priestly t-shirt if not to cover himself? It's about authority. By donning priestly vestments, David appears to assume priestly authority, which was not rightfully his. King Saul had been condemned for similar actions. This event resulted in a permanent split between David and his wife. The story ends by telling us that Michal remained childless as a result, which culturally speaking was evidence of guilt upon the woman.

So, who was in the wrong? Whose hands were not clean? Whose heart was not pure? The text never offers any clear judgement on the matter. I'm not certain. For I am reluctant to judge or allow myself to feel superior to David writer of psalms and man after God's own heart. (See: 1 Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) Because we know David's history, his words in Psalm 24 are more intimidating. Regardless of your reading of this text, David's hands were not clean, and his heart was not pure. Therefore, by his own words in the psalm he had no right to stand in the holiness of God's Temple. If David fails the test, where does that leave us?

It leaves us where exactly we were before I preached last Sunday, with nothing other than grace. And so, I'm feeling torn. We are called to strive for the highest of standards. We are held accountable to that by God, and yet we are, it seems, destined to fail. Still, in a few moments, though we have neither squeaky-clean hands nor spotlessly pure hearts, we will be invited into the holiness of our Lord's Table. How can that be? This is where the last of today's four lectionary readings comes in. The Apostle Paul put it this way: "*God chose us in Christ... to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ...*" (Eph. 1:4-5) We are made fit for this celebration only by the grace of God. Amen.

## Next Sunday's Message

Title: "Wrapped in the Peace of God"

Scriptures: Mark 6:7-13, 30-34; Ephesians 2:11-22

Starting Point: The word "peace" is almost as over worked as the word "love." The word peace is used in such a variety of ways that it can be hard to pin down, but whatever it means, the word appears consistently in scripture. Jesus is the "*Prince of Peace.*" (Isa. 9:6) The "*peace of God*" is described as "*surpassing all understanding.*" (Phil. 4:7) In speaking of Jews and Gentiles, Paul wrote that "*Christ is our peace.*" (Eph. 2:14) Peter wrote that we must "*do good*" and "*seek peace*" (1 Peter 3:11) Jesus blessed peacemakers and called them "*children of God.*" (Mt. 5:9) One way or another, peace is a gift promised to us and part of our charge in this world.

## Minister's Moment

Friends and Disciples:

While I am drawn to many scriptures, two of my favorites deal with prayer.

- "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" (1 Thes. 5:16-18)
- "*...in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.*" (Phil 4:6)

There are many scriptures dealing with prayer, but I like these in particular because they prescribe prayer for any and all circumstances. If you are happy, pray! If you are sad, pray! If you need guidance, pray! If you are sick, pray! If you are well, pray! Whatever the circumstance, pray! And if you run out of words or don't know how to pray in any given situation, there is help for that too. For *"the Spirit helps us in our weakness"* and *"intercedes with sighs too deep for words."* (Ro. 8:26)

The scope of prayer is such that it would be all but impossible for me to offer an all-encompassing statement about prayer. While it is only a single aspect of prayer, regardless of the situation, regardless of the need, whether thanksgiving, petition or intercession, the act of prayer itself changes us. To pray is to invite transformation.

All of this leads to a single point. The Faith Sharing Ministry has been focusing on church growth this year. In the process, many possibilities have been discussed and a number of specific steps taken. One of those ideas will soon move past the planning stage and reach the active phase. **On Sunday, September 9 we will hold a Bring a Friend Sunday**, but before we get busy *"doing stuff"* we must begin praying. We must begin with prayer because no matter what else prayer accomplishes, it invites transformation.

When it comes to sharing our faith and inviting others into our congregation's family of faith, we need to be transformed! I say that because we are altogether too reluctant to share our faith in God who is steadfast in love, filled with mercy, overflowing with compassion, and active in this world! Likewise, we are altogether too reluctant to invite others into our congregational family of faith. Though not perfect, we are a place where faith can grow and that is the ultimate standard for evaluating any church.

Though we have almost eight weeks until "Bring a Friend" Sunday, I am asking everyone to begin praying now. We are not merely hoping for a few warm bodies, we are seeking transformation by God's Holy Spirit.

Yours in Christ,

Jesse

## Prayer Concerns

While we believe everyone needs prayer, those named on our list have specific and ongoing needs,

Evelyn Lively

David Hahn

Bob & Liz McGee

R. J. Bozeman

Gerry Hart

Jim & Millie Carter

Kevin Rodgers

family of Eleanor Kindt

Diane Andrews (friend of Cheryl Aufderheide)

Christopher Cravey (Jeanette Phariss's nephew)

Fr. Craig Heenan (friend of Bob Richards)

MaryLynn Janetopoulos (mother of a colleague of Karl Aufderheide)

Ellie Erin Albrecht

Julie Atterbury

D'andre Fleeks

Brad Slocum (brother of Stacy Atterbury)

Roger & Emily Nichols

Mark Stadelman

family of Mary Anna Franke

Jim Conway (cousin of Bob Richards)

Bill Green (brother of Larry Green)

Leatha Jeffrey (Calvin Jeffrey's mother)

Hector Cortes

### Shut-Ins

Henry & Rosemary O'Neal, Gene Holt, Marge Shepperd, Nancy Wright

# Serving Sunday, July 22

**Elders:**

Melvin Weber  
Ben Tedrick

**Deacons:**

Stacy Atterbury  
Jane Colbert  
Vicki Green  
Steven Myers

**Lay Leader:**

Sharon Jeffrey

**Communion:**

Ben Tedrick

**Choir Director:**

Karl Aufderheide

**Pianist**

Karen Smith

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH B/CS						
JULY 2018						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
<b>1</b> CYF/Youth 3: PM Moming Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b> Independence Day	<b>5</b> Choir 7:30 PM	<b>6</b> OFFICE CLOSED	<b>7</b>
<b>8</b> CYF/Youth 3: PM Moming Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b> Choir 7:30 PM Elders Meeting 6:00 PM	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b> OFFICE CLOSED	<b>14</b>
<b>15</b> CYF/Youth 3: PM General Board Mtg (after Worship) Moming Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b> Choir 7:30 PM Disciples Women Craft Day 10am	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b> OFFICE CLOSED	<b>21</b>
<b>22</b> CYF/Youth 3: PM Moming Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM	<b>23</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>25</b> Choir 7:30 PM	<b>26</b>	<b>27</b> OFFICE CLOSED	<b>28</b>
<b>29</b> Carriage Inn 2:00 CYF/Youth 3: PM Moming Worship 10:45 AM Sunday School 9:30 AM	<b>30</b>	<b>31</b>				