

Sunday March 11, 2018 - 10:00 a.m.
*Please stand if you are able

Prelude
Welcome and Announcements

We Gather Around God's Word

Bells and Chimes Call To Worship:

Introit: v .v. 1, 2 & 5 **“Christ Be Our Light”** (See PowerPoint)

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***Call to Worship:** ☺

L: Brothers and sisters in Christ, why have you come to worship this morning?

P: We come to celebrate the love of God in the form of Jesus Christ.

L: This love reaches through the shadows of our lives to embrace us.

Our challenge is to trust the light of God's love in the midst of our struggles.

**P: We come to celebrate the light of God in Jesus
who offers love and acceptance, not judgment and rejection.**

L: If only we will trust, Jesus leads us in the way of light and love.

All: We come to celebrate our God who loved and loves us so much!

***Opening Hymn: #52** **“There Is a Name I Love to Hear”**

Prayer of Reconciliation: ☺

L: O God of Comfort and God of Challenge, we come to you this morning the way the Israelites did, full of complaints and dissatisfaction. Nothing is enough; we do not recognize your blessing at work in our day to day lives.

**All: Forgive us when we become so comfortable that we moan and groan
about the most insignificant details of our lives.**

L: In our complaints, challenge us as you did the Israelites, to consider the bigger picture of oppression, injustice, and inequality around us.

**All: Forgive us when we close our eyes for fear of what you might show us;
keep sending loving and compassionate leaders to open our eyes until we see
what you see in our world.**

Assurance of God's Blessing ☺

L: You are blessed because God's image resides deep within each of you.
So return God's blessing by the way you love others.

Extending God's Peace

L: As we rise up to new life in Christ may the peace of Christ be with you all.

P: And also with you.

Special Music: by: Diane Rondeau "Because He Lives"

We Engage God's Word

Scripture Readings: Numbers 21:4-9 (Page 120)
Psalm 107: 1-3, 17-22 (Page 507)
John 3:14-21 (Page 906)

Youth Moment/Lord's Prayer

Reflection "Let the Redeemed of God Say So"

*"O give thanks to God, for God is good;
for God's steadfast love endures forever.
Let the redeemed of God say so,
those whom God redeemed from trouble."*

After suffering unbearable pain for a week and a half now, knowing that there is cancer the two of them wait in the hospital room for the doctor to come and give them the results of the PET Scan. The Doctor arrives and gives them the news that the cancer is terminal and she could have treatments but the likelihood of it helping her with the various other health issues was not good and would most likely hasten death rather than prolong life. Also, the quality of life left would be greatly reduced from the effects of the treatment.

The patient's response to hearing that was this: "That is an evil report and wasn't very nice. You know you are not the only healer that there is. Jesus is the healer of our every ill." The doctor replied, "I wish I had your faith." to which the patient began to witness to the doctor scriptures on healing. The beautiful thing in all of this is the Doctor did not attempt to remove that hope and listened to her testimony. Even so, it was obvious he was concerned that she wouldn't face reality but he was assured that the patient was fully aware that healing comes in many forms and if God chose to heal her physically that would happen and if not that God knew best what she needed healing from and would provide that.

*"Some were sick through their sinful ways,
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;
they loathed any kind of food,
and they drew near to the gates of death.
Then they cried to God in their trouble,"*

The two in this story are my sister and myself. My sister decided not to take any treatments and to seek the care of Hospice of Dubuque. But as we sat in the hospital

room we talked about what she wanted to pray for. She had been consumed by anger and bitterness much of her life and it affected her relationships and joy in life. The stress brought on by harboring all that anger and bitterness most likely was a factor in her various health issues. Though she loved the Lord and wanted everyone to love Jesus she often times struggled with embracing that love and forgiveness not only for herself but in offering it to others.

In our reading from Numbers, When the Israelites cried to God to rid them of the venomous snakes, God did not remove the venomous snakes; rather he gave them a symbol that made them face the venom in their life and as they did that they would live. As Donna faced the venom that was poisoning her life and cried out to God, she proclaimed "I am tired of living like this." She began praying earnestly. "This hatred, anger and bitterness that is within me is not of you God. I am tired of hanging on to this. I want you to take this from me. I am giving it to you. I only want in me what is of you." There were more words than that but that was the central theme of her prayer and as she prayed and expressed her trust in God's love and God's ability to bring that healing into her and remove that affliction from her life, I visibly watched the weight of the anger and bitterness being lifted from her and saw her spirit being lifted; over the last 4 days of her life I witnessed her spirit soar. I witnessed her mending relationships and experiencing true peace and joy in her life. I also witnessed people sharing with her the ways she had been a gift in their lives and all of us though acknowledging the frustrations we had in our relationship with her God opened our eyes and hearts and we began to more fully realize and embrace the gifts she had given to us throughout her life. Not only did she receive healing and deliverance but we did as well.

and God saved them from their distress;
God sent out God's word and healed them,
and delivered them from destruction.

Her last days on earth were spent in my home. Initially I thought she would have to go to a nursing home because there was no way I could care for her on my own. She couldn't be left alone and transfers would require two people. It was then that another sister said if my husband and I were willing to take Donna in that she would come live with us until Donna passed and help with her care. You see the doctors originally said at the most she would have 6 months to live but then cut that back to more realistically 3 months. After watching the rapid decrease in her health I wondered if she would make it through the weekend but needed to plan for the months of care. When I told Donna, because I had other help, that she could come to my house for the duration of her life. She told me that I wouldn't be sorry, that she wouldn't be a burden and that she would praise and glorify God in her last days and said "You just watch and see!" And watch and see I did, we all did!

Though only living 4 days from that final diagnosis with the doctor it was four days of blessings and healing as we gathered around her bed, shared stories, offered comfort, read scripture, prayed, sang hymns and witnessed God's presence and guidance in times of trial. When we sang the hymns she was no longer able to speak but I knew she wanted to praise God so we sang some of her favorite hymns and when we sang "How Great Thou Art" I sang with more joy than I ever have in my life before or

after that. You could hear her attempt to sing along but I told her I knew that I was able to sing with such joy because God was allowing me to be her voice and experience the joy that was in her heart as she neared the time she would be welcomed into the arms of the one whose love endures forever. My brother wanting to play a video that expressed my sister's life was looking on the internet for the song "Blessed Be Your Name" because even though Donna had experienced much bitterness throughout her life she also offered God praise and gave God the credit for the blessings in her life. I told my brother that I had a DVD with that song on it but as I told him that I could only think that what we were witnessing was God's healing rain which is another song on one of my DVDs. As I inserted the DVD for Blessed be Your Name it didn't go to the menu as it usually does It just began playing the song "Healing Rain" which was the seventh song on the DVD and would not go back to the start menu to select a song until "Healing Rain played. So we shared both of those songs with her. While sitting outside on the deck with my daughter a single dove flew overhead parallel to the house until it came to the room where my sister lay and then took a right turn and flew over that room where she lay.

*"Let them thank God for God's steadfast love,
for God's wonderful works to humankind.
And let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of God's deeds with songs of joy."*

Donna died on that Saturday evening. I was the pulpit supply pastor for another pastor in Sherrill Iowa. I thought, "I can't get another pastor for the supply pastor," so I led worship and preached the next day. Because of all the busyness with my sister I hadn't even begun to prepare my sermon but what we just experienced had fit well into the scriptures for the day so I used that experience to testify to God's love and care and healing even if it comes in a way that we don't anticipate. I didn't hesitate sharing her story because of her words, "I will praise and glorify God, you just wait and see!" I found out that the message I delivered in Sherrill gave a word of hope to someone in that congregation who was just given a terminal diagnosis that healing in one form or another would take place in her life.

Donna requested that I do her funeral. I told her you are not supposed to do family funerals. She then insisted that I knew her very well and would do just fine, you are my pastor. Though I didn't do her whole funeral, I did much of the planning with family selecting scriptures and music, I helped lead the worship service, sang with the choir, and I delivered the message. After sharing my message of her life and her desire for all to come to know Jesus and her love of Jesus without glossing over her struggles in life I opened it up for others to share about her life. When they were done sharing I told them that Donna got the last words and everyone got a chuckle out of that. You see every time she went to her daughter's house she would ask her to play Leann Rimes song "I Believe" Once again she will testify to God's great deeds and give honor and glory to God for God's steadfast love. Let us listen and believe.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Dy-03Ken_Q

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

*So, let us thank God for God's steadfast love,
for God's wonderful works to humankind.*

*And let us offer sacrifices of thanksgiving,
and tell of God's deeds with songs of joy,
and with our very lives!*

All glory and honor be yours ever loving God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

Video: “I Believe”

We Respond to God's Word

Sharing Joys, Concerns, and Prayers for the World

Call to Offering/ Offertory

***Doxology:**

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise God all creatures here below;
Praise God for all that love has done;
Creator, Christ and Spirit, One. Amen.**

***Prayer of Dedication:** 🙏 (In Unison)

***O Generous One, we give thanks to you for your steadfast love endures forever.
May these gifts be used to feed the hunger and satisfy the thirst
of all those you love throughout your creation. Amen.***

We Are Sent Into the World

***Sending Hymn:** “Lord, Be Glorified” (See PowerPoint)

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*** Benediction and Response:**

GO NOW IN PEACE

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