

Service of Witness to the Resurrection
Charles Dickinson
June 25, 2010

Isaiah 43:18-21; Matthew 5:4-9, 43-45;
Revelation 21:1-4

My friends, I must confess when I was first asked to preside at this service of worship today I was a tad uncertain.

I've had the privilege of presiding at many funerals in my ministry but never one quite like this. What should I do? What should I say?

Fortunately, being a Presbyterian, I have a book: *The Book of Common Worship*. I went and consulted the *Book of Common Worship* and would you believe it didn't have much advice either? Apparently what we are doing is a new thing.

But, being both a Presbyterian and a Christian I also have another book, a much older book: the Bible.

In the older part of that book, in the Old Testament, we read these words of comfort to a people in exile,

a people who are spending all their time looking at the past rather than praising God for the blessings of the present and what God will do in the future. The Lord says:

Isaiah 43:18-21

- ¹⁸ Do not remember the former things,
or consider the things of old.
- ¹⁹ I am about to do a new thing;
now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?
I will make a way in the wilderness
and rivers in the desert.
- ²⁰ The wild animals will honor me,
the jackals and the ostriches;
for I give water in the wilderness,
rivers in the desert,
to give drink to my chosen people,
- ²¹ the people whom I formed for myself
so that they might declare my praise.

In the new part of that book, the New Testament, we read these words from our Lord, Jesus Christ:

Matthew 5:4-9, 43-45

- 4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
- 5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
- 6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
- 7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
- 8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
- 9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

43 'You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.

And finally, in the very last part of that old book, we find this vision of the future:

Revelation 21:1-4

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

²And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

'See, the home of God is among mortals.

He will dwell with them;

they will be his peoples,

and God himself will be with them;

⁴ he will wipe every tear from their eyes.

Death will be no more;

mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'

Friends, we gather here in the presence of God - the God of the Past, the God of the Present and the God of the Future - in order to remember, to pray, and to proclaim our hope for the future.

We gather in the presence of God to remember an event from the past. And while we mourn the events themselves we also must look at them with clear eyes and sober judgments.

I am sure everyone involved thought they were doing the right and proper thing but honestly, did any of them by their actions proclaim the kingdom of peace?

Did any of them witness to the God of reconciliation?

Did they give any hope for a future where there would be neither sorrow nor sighing, and pain should be no more?

And so let us pray for them all that God's grace and forgiveness may be with them. Knowing as we do that even now they are already gathered at the table of love we will all find in that new Kingdom.

We gather here in the presence of God to reflect on our own lives. We remember both what we have done well and what we have done not so well.

Are we really any different than Charles and Andrew?

Are we ourselves any less prone to their emotions?

Certainly we settle our disagreements differently now. That's a good thing.

But do our actions any more proclaim the Kingdom of God than did theirs?

And so let us pray for ourselves, that we
will comfort those who mourn,
succor the weak and nourish the empty,
live lives of peace and show God's love
to both our enemy and our friend.

We gather here in the presence of God to
look to and proclaim our faith in the future.
We look forward to the new Heaven and new Earth,
where God dwells with us and we dwell with God.

We look forward to the day when we shall
join Andrew and Charles and so many others
at the eternal table where every tear has been
dried and where sorrows and sighing are no more.

So now, in the presence of the God of the
Past, the God of the Present and the God of the
Future, let us look to the past with compassion
and respect.

Let us look to the present and our own witness
to the Good News.

Let us look to the future and the joy
and peace we proclaim.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the
Holy Spirit, Amen.

Sisters and Brothers, let us now commend our brother's mortal remains to the earth and his soul to God. Let us remember the difference between these two events. For we are mortal, and our days upon this earth are few.

Some day our bodies will be like Charles' and we will be committed to a final resting place.

But some day our souls will be like Charles' and we shall be with God and all the saints of heaven gathered around the table of the Lord, a place where there shall no longer be sorrow, but always the joy of God's presence. Thanks be to God.

Please pray with me:

"Eternal God, whose days are without end, help us always to remember how brief life is and that the hour of our death is known only to you.

"Lead us, by your Holy Spirit, to live in holiness and justice all our days. Then, after serving you in the fellowship of your church, in faith, hope, and love, may we enter with joy into the fullness of your kingdom.

"Trusting in your eternal love, we are bold to pray the old prayer, that we me live well both in our present and in your future.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into

temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen."

Almighty God, you only are immortal, the creator and maker of us all. We are mortal, formed of the earth, and to earth we shall return.

This you ordained when you created us, saying, "You are dust, and to dust you shall return." All of us go down to the dust; yet even at the grave we make our song:

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.
Give rest, O Christ, to your servant with all your saints, where there is neither pain nor sorrow nor sighing, but life everlasting.

Holy God, by your creative power you gave us the gift of life, and in your redeeming love you have given us new life in Christ.

We commend our brother Charles to your merciful keeping in the faith of Christ our Lord who died and rose again to save us.

Acknowledge, we humbly pray, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming.

Hold him in the arms of your mercy,
in the blessed rest of everlasting peace,
with all the glorious company of the saints
in light. Amen.

Blessing:

Go in peace, and may the peace of God,
which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge
and love of God, and of God's Son Jesus Christ
our Lord.

May the blessings of God almighty,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
remain with you always. Amen.

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