

Live Stream on Facebook at 10:25 AM: [First Christian Church Decatur](#)

“God is God of the Living”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Third Sunday of Eastertide, Sunday, May 1, 2022
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Sr. Pastor

Holy Scriptures: Psalm 78: 1-7 Matthew 22: 23-33

Psalm 78: 1-7

- ¹ Give ear, my people, to my teaching;
 incline your ears to the utterances of my mouth.
- ² I will open my mouth in a proverb;
 I will utter riddles from of old.
- ³ Which we have heard and known,
 and which our mothers and fathers told us.
- ⁴ We will not hide them from their daughters and sons;
 we will recount to generations to come
the praiseworthy deeds of the God Who Speaks Life,
 and God’s might and the wonders the Creator has done.
- ⁵ God gave decrees for Jacob and Rebecca’s descendants,
 and placed teaching among Abraham and Sarah’s offspring,
which God commanded their mothers and fathers
 to make known to their children.
- ⁶ In order that a coming generation, children yet to be, might know,
 and will rise up and tell their daughters and sons.
- ⁷ Then they will put their confidence in God,
and not forget the works of God,
 but will keep God’s commandments.

Matthew 22:23-33

²³ The same day [that Jesus taught about taxes] some Sadducees came to him, saying there is no resurrection; and they questioned him, saying, ²⁴ “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies without having children, his brother shall marry the [widow] woman, and raise up offspring for his brother.’ ²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married, and died without having offspring, leaving the woman to his brother. ²⁶ The same for the second, and the third, to the seventh. ²⁷ After everything the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, then, for which of the seven will she be wife? For they all had her.”

²⁹ Jesus answered them, “You all are wrong, because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, rather they are like angels in heaven. ³¹ And about the resurrection of the dead, have you all not read what was said to you by God, ³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? God is God not of the dead, but of the living.” ³³ And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

Sermon

I Love to Tell the Story

*“...some Sadducees came to Jesus,
saying there is no resurrection...
They questioned Jesus, saying,
“Teacher, Moses said,
‘If a man dies without having children,
his brother shall marry the [widow] woman,
and raise up offspring for his brother.’
Now there were seven brothers among us;
the first married, and died without having offspring,
leaving the woman to his brother.
The same for the second, and the third, to the seventh.
After everything the woman died.
In the resurrection, then,
for which of the seven will she be wife?”*

Imagine that Jesus was put on the spot,
that He had to respond,
and that His response
needed to be pithy, sure, on target and memorable.

He modelled that we inform from a distance;
we impact from up close.

He had to be quick, quick on his feet, quick to address a complex question
about the Law of Moses
and God’s gift of life and life everlasting
and communal confusion about the afterlife.

I imagine He wanted to say, *“Yours is the most ridiculous question I ever heard!”*
Instead, He took them seriously, respectfully,
and, filled with the audacity of one who knows God,
shared His faith, all in under two minutes.

*Jesus answered them,
"You all are wrong,
because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God.
For in the resurrection [the resurrected]
neither marry nor are given in marriage,
rather they are like angels in heaven.
And about the resurrection of the dead...God said,
'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'
God is the God of those who died and live forever in heaven.
God is God not of the dead, but of the living."*

And when the crowd heard it, they were astounded at His teaching.
And His passion.
And His faith sharing.
And His quick-thinking telling of God's story, His story,
which is now our story,
that God is God of the living.

I Love to Tell the Story

She stood in front of the bright lights of late-night television.
She was quite a sight in her bulky black boots that laced up her legs.
She looked into the eyes of the live studio audience
and the eyes she knew were watching on TVs in homes across the nation.
Over there was the late-night talk show host who was up for jokes and celebrities,
and she was neither.
She stood still.
She spoke clearly and succinctly,
knowing that she only had two minutes,
two minutes to make an impression,
two minutes to get her message across,
two minutes to make a world of difference.
She told a story.
She said she'd heard of men and women working the land
in countries where past wars and current civil strife
left landmines scattered and hidden,
landmines waiting in deadly silence and mystery for years & years,
waiting for unsuspecting people to touch them,
waiting to obliterate limbs and lives.
She said she'd invented landmine resistant boots,
handmade boots with thick soles of leather and metal to deflect the blast.
The thick boots were field-tested, battle-tested, effective, expensive.
Shepherds and tillers of the soil would benefit if they wore such thick boots.

However, the cost of the boots was prohibitive to farmers and shepherds.
She said she'd made a website and then she named it,
saying you can give \$10 or \$100 or more
toward the purchase of pairs of landmine resistant boots
for our global neighbors who had the need
yet not the means
for what would save their lives and feet.

That's it.

Her minutes were up,
and the talk show host was back,
cracking jokes and announcing the special celebrity guest.

My Lord and my God!

She'd two minutes to make a world of difference,
and sometimes that is all we get.
She used every second to drive home her passion,
her creativity and resourcefulness, her love for humanity,
her hope that there were others,
thousands and millions of other people who cared,
who wanted to make a world of difference.

Her passion and compassion and witness blew my mind.
She demonstrated that we inform from a distance;
we impact from up close, with our presence and passion.

You know, as a matter of fact, I did not see her on television.

I did not witness her passion and drive and hope for humanity.

I heard her story second hand, and now you are hearing it third hand.
I heard someone else tell me the story, someone who had seen her live on late-night TV.
So, I researched it and found that it is all true,
and now here I am telling you her story,
all worked up and excited, enthusiastic, energized
because someone wants to make a world of difference.

Someone is inviting us – you and me and you and you –
to join in and get on board,
to affirm and testify that that God is God of the living.

Passion is catching.

Compassion that bubbles up and overflows makes a world of difference.

A changed life, a life restored, a soul resurrected,
a life filled with purpose for the common good

is contagious.

I Love to Tell the Story

Some of us were blessed to hear the Rev. Dr. Holly McKissick speak in 2011
in Nashville at the General Assembly of the Christian Church.
Holly McKissick is Senior Pastor of Peace Christian Church UCC in Kansas City.
She spoke about what our neighbors are looking for
in a spiritual faith community.
When our neighbors are asked what they want,
what they say is us.

“In survey after survey, what people say they want is this,” she said,
gesturing to the over 5,000 Disciples of Christ in the audience. “It’s us.”

Holly pointed out that we as a denomination are poised for growth
because we embody exactly what people are longing and searching for
even if they don’t really know it or can’t articulate it.
The frustrating part is that few people know
who we are or what we are about.
She shared that when she first started in pastoral ministry,
she wished that our church leaders
would hire a slick advertising company
that would rebrand us into something new, novel, sexy or sleek.

As a matter of fact, we’ve shared the same conversation here in Decatur, as well.

Now, McKissick says, she realizes that’s not the answer.
Now she’d settle for an elevator speech.
An elevator speech is a couple of tight, well-crafted sentences
which say who we are, succinctly, sincerely, with passion and joy.
Every Disciple of Christ needs an elevator speech.
All you have to do -- don’t you love that expression –
all you have to do is practice.
The next time someone says to you,
*“Hey, your church seems to be really important to you.
What kind is it? I’ve never heard of it.”*

Remember that we inform from a distance;
we impact from up close.

So be ready to say something like:

“Well, we aren’t really all that well known

*because we aren't like some of those faith traditions
who act like they have all the answers.
We know the world is not right or wrong, good or bad, us or them;
we know God's world is rich and filled with color and varied
and filled with hungry kids and flooded towns,
and we are just the kind of church
that likes to roll up our sleeves
and seek to be a sign of God's healing and hope!"*

Or you might tell a story
about our practice of hospitality, healing grace, and hands-on missions.

Or you could share how you've experienced
that God is God of the living.

Or you could offer that at First Christian Church of Decatur,
"even I am welcomed home!"

Holly McKissick pointed out that unchurched people
want a spiritual faith community – they want to connect with the holy --
yet are not interested in churches
that are all hung up on dividing folks into us or them.

Folks in our fair city seek congregations that celebrate
the range of God's creation
and help each other through the difficult complexities of life.

She said that many of our unchurched neighbors say,
*"If I could find a church that isn't trying to own Jesus,
but simply follow him, I would go."*

What our neighbors mean is that
they dream of a sacred place, a safe place,
a spiritual home and community where they could go
with their questions and doubts
and still be accepted,
like us.

If only they could find a church that instead of trying to divide the world
was finding ways to live together,
like us.

If only they could unearth a church that wasn't trying to own Jesus
but simply follow him,
like us.

If they could find a church like that,
they would go.

We are a church like that;

you know and feel this
because you and I are living out such a faith experience.
We discovered it firsthand.
So, take two minutes and share your discovery.
Share your story succinctly and sincerely.
The point of telling faith stories
is not only so the Body of Christ will grow.
Holly McKissick reminds us that,
“It wasn’t about this denomination for our founders
and it sure shouldn’t be for us.”
The point is about helping the unhoused and hungry,
the broke and the broken,
doing mission and loving our neighbors as ourselves,
inside and outside our sanctuary and along the city streets.

The point is giving another soul, another family, another home
the same gifts of God that you have:
the gifts of hope, healing and hospitality.
The end of the story
is the lame walking and blind seeing and thirsty drinking.

“And how will they know, unless we tell the story?”

I Love to Tell the Story

My story is grounded in forgiveness.
When you are forgiven, when someone forgives you,
you feel so glad, so grateful,
so alive and powerful and passionate.
You can’t keep it in; nor should you.
Your joy and relief, passion and power are catching.

I speak and breathe from such a place,
a place grounded in forgiveness that changed my life.
At age 18, I got in trouble,
Got kicked out of school,
Called home from far away, in tears, ashamed and shamed,
feeling as low and lousy as can be, blubbering out an “I’m sorry.”
Parents were quick to respond, to share their love, their faith in God and their son.
Parents’ voices on the other end of the long-distance call
said, “We love you. Come home.”

In that moment, I went from knowing about Jesus to knowing Jesus.
Forgiveness, hospitality, grace, unconditional love

were abstract words heard countless times, devoid of real meaning.
Suddenly they became a blessed reality in my life.

Got home on a Greyhound bus.
Home church took me in, loved on me, kissed and cuffed me,
put me back on my feet
then sent me back to where I came from
to finish what had been started.

For this forgiven soul,
Jesus became real
because His Church was real.

The Church became God incarnate, God with some skin on it.
Every time I tell my story I get a lump in my throat.
As the Mumford Sons sang, "You forgave, and I won't forget."
When you forgive, you give away power.
You empower.
When you are forgiven, when your "I'm sorry" is heard, you become grateful.
You are empowered.
It's both an ending and a new beginning.
That is a big part of my story.

I Love to Tell the Story

What is yours?

What story do you love to tell?

Everyone here has a story to tell.
Your story may be about forgiveness offered, or received, or shared.
Your story may be about a helping hand offered, or received, or shared.
Your story may be about a healing scar and mercy offered, or received, or shared.
You have a story,
and in the telling
we witness your passion, your power, your persona exemplified.

The way you live your faith out loud
may be the only sermon your neighbor experiences.
Love someone.
Serve somebody.
Do justice.
Embody piety.
Pray for someone you know and someone you don't know yet.
Seek to connect your passion and skills and resources to make a world of difference.

Then, for goodness' sake, tell someone!
We inform from a distance;
we impact from up close.

When you get a chance to share, go for it.
Trust me, God gives you plenty of chances.
Make an impression; tell your story; share your passion; let your light shine.
My Lord and my God!

I Love to Tell the Story

There is a legendary story in my family from my childhood days
about the day my mother Buffy was in a back room of the house
and she heard a knock on the door.
My brothers answered the knock, and being only 5 or 6 or 7 years old,
said loudly, "Daddy is not home!"
and then promptly slammed the door.
Buffy hustled to the front and reopened the door
and helped to smooth a church member's ruffled feathers.

That afternoon she taught her sons to open the front door and then say,
*"Won't you please come in and have a seat?
My mommy or daddy will be right with you."*

A few days later she was taking a bath
when she heard a knock on the door.
A young voice said,
*"Won't you please come in and have a seat?
My mommy or daddy will be right with you."*
She hustled to get dressed.
When she walked to the front of our home
she found the living room full of Jehovah's Witnesses.
Two hours later
Buffy was silently wishing
she had qualified the hospitality lesson she taught her sons.

I Love to Tell the Story

We are richly, deeply blessed to be given two minutes to make a world of difference,
and sometimes that is all we get
to share about God being a God of the living.
Let's use the opportunities before us to release our passion,
our creativity and resourcefulness, our love for humanity,

our hope that there are others, thousands and millions of others who care
who desire to make a world of difference as well.

Imagine

what we will look like and sound like and feel like down the road
because we dare to share our own personal and communal stories.

Imagine what the city of God will be like

because you and I decided on Sunday, May 1, 2022,
we are going to take a risk
and live our faith intensely, with joy and sincerity.

The point is to give another soul, another family, another home
the same gift of God that you have:

the gift of hope, healing and hospitality.

The point is to love and serve the homeless and hungry and hopeless
inside and outside our sanctuary and along our city streets.

The end of the story—and the new beginning—
is the lame walking, the blind seeing, the thirsty drinking.

The end of the story—and the new beginning—
is redemption, restoration, resurrection,
all gifts from a God of the living.

And how do you think the story will be known unless we tell it?

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!