



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“IN PURSUIT OF HOPE”

Scripture Lesson: Matthew 3:16

This sermon was preached by Manning Snyder on Youth Sunday, February 7, 2016 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

On the evening of June 17, 2015, during a prayer service, nine innocent people were killed by a crazed gunman at Mother Emanuel AME church. The suspect, Dylann Roof, just 21 years old, confessed that he committed the atrocious act in hopes of igniting a race war. The aftermath, as expected, was hectic, but instead of granting Roof’s wish of a race war, the people of Charleston came together and denounced any hate-motivated response. Despite some criticism from some organizations, the community responded with a forgiving, peaceful response to Roof and the shooting, demonstrating our community’s purity and commitment to faith. As the national contingency flocked to the Lowcountry to cover the events, local businesses pledged portions of their sales to support Mother Emanuel AME. One of the first companies to respond was Palmetto Moon, as they created Charleston Strong t-shirts. The company ordered 3,500 t-shirts in black and white. Within two hours of the release, they were sold out. The design had a palmetto tree; but instead of the customary branches, the top of the tree was designed with nine white doves representing the nine victims of the shooting. You might wonder, why doves? The answer might surprise you.

Few symbols have a tradition as long and as rich as the dove. Doves are represented roughly fifty times in the Bible, but the animal serves as a symbol for hope and beginning to many. In the story of Noah and the Ark, they returned with an olive branch, another symbol for peace and purity to Noah. In many parts of the Eastern hemisphere, doves were domesticated in many households. Another popular example of a dove’s significance is in the baptism story. The passage was built on the pre-existing symbol of the dove as God’s spirit and firmly entrenched it as the preferred representation of the Holy Spirit. It is also very ironic that a dove is an extremely sensitive bird, as it flies away at the least bit of disturbance. While being exceedingly shy, the animal is one of the most beautiful of all of God’s creatures. God is still sending out his “doves” today to bring the message of hope and peace to all who denounce God and Christ. Doves are used in many occasions—they are released at weddings and released at funerals. Doves are used in times of happiness and immense sadness. And doves were released at the funerals of those killed in the Emanuel AME shooting.

Whether symbolizing the Holy Spirit or beauty, the animal represents hope and faith- the opportunity of a new beginning with Christ. So the next time you are outside, be aware of your surroundings, and cherish all that God has created, even something so small as a dove.



FIRST (SCOTS) SERMONS

“UP, UP AND AWAY”

Scripture Lesson: Psalm 55:4-8

This sermon was preached by Megan Holderness on Youth Sunday, February 7, 2016 at First (Scots) Presbyterian Church in Charleston, South Carolina.

Recently, I was looking through a memory book that my mom made for me as a Confirmation gift 2 years ago. As I was looking through the book filled with pictures ranging from my infancy to 8th grade, I was thinking 1 of 3 things the whole time: either “oh, I remember that”, “aw, I was so cute”, or “ew, what was I wearing?!” I would cringe and make funny faces when I saw these photos, and I desperately wished I could have run away.

But God didn’t care. As I was reminded by Song of Songs 4:7, the Lord says, “You are all together beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you.” Well, that certainly comforted me and a wave of relief ran over me.

Even still, I don’t think the “anguish” God describes in Psalms is directed toward my selfish insecurities about my appearance. You see, He means really heart-breaking problems and situations that seem hopeless and without a solution, not a minor worry that could be fixed by a shopping spree. Things like financial troubles, strife between families, loneliness and grief, the kind of heart ache that rocks you to your core. How are we supposed to fix that? How can we run away from our problems? The grass is always greener on the other side, right?

As far as dealing with problems in earthly ways, we will always think the grass is greener over there or over there, but the brighter shade of them all will never be found. But God and our Lord Jesus Christ can take us there directly. We are simply humans, ready for flight with God as our wings, lifting us up higher and higher. We can go wherever we want and all things are possible with Him. We can be free from the words of others and the doubts we have in our own minds. However, we must not stray from God, even when things get tough or we become too overwhelmed by the pain of our tragedy. James 1:12 says, “Blessed is the one who preserves under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him.” Whenever we think we can handle our troubles all by ourselves and wander off the perfect path God has laid before us, we lose those wings to fly and, without the ability to fly away with God, can we ever really be free or, just as importantly, happy?

See, there will always be people or things in this world who will penetrate your little bubble of happiness and bliss and infect it with their words, their corrupt ideas. Some people judge you based on what you wear and your opinions on certain topics. They try to change who you are and what you will become.

“What can flesh do to me?” asks Psalms 56:4.

Others try to convince you that you're wrong and tear down what confidence you've built up. They disguise themselves as people of honor and purity, but soon show their true colors along with their intentions. They cause heavy hearts and jumbled minds, worried thoughts and poor souls.

"What can a mere mortal do to me?" asks Psalms 56:11.

We are reminded by Psalms 119:19 that "I am a stranger on the earth" and in 2 Corinthians 4:18, "so we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

If, in the grand scheme of things, a "mere mortal" or an earthly situation can influence you in a negative way so much, how much, then, can God affect us too? "My heart is in anguish...Fear, trembling, and horror overwhelm me...O that I had the wings like a dove!...I would flee far away," out from the sins of the world and into the open arms of the Lord.

Amen.