



**A Time of Celebration
Sunday, August 11, 2019
Rev. Dr. Craig Lindsey**

When we came out to interview a few weeks ago, someone asked “Why do you want to be the Chaplain of a Retirement Community?” And I immediately replied, “I Don’t! I have been searching to be pastor of Valley Presbyterian Church!” And the Project I most enjoy is loving a congregation and being loved by them/ You.

None of us would ever intentionally harm another person, or try to cause suffering. That is the very definition of a Socio-Path. But there is a reality that resurrection comes only after death. More than “what does not kill you makes you stronger”, as Christians our truth is that we believe in the resurrection! However, as humans, we want to succeed and succeed and be resurrected as our final accomplishment, our own greatest reward; yet suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope and hope does not disappoint. Resurrection only comes after death.

When introducing myself, I like to describe that I am a 2nd generation Presbyterian Pastor, my father, mother, father-in-law all having graduated Seminary. My parents were engaged in planting New Church Developments, much as the first pastors of this church in the 1970s. While I have two older brothers, something tragic happened during my birth and my mother’s heart stopped and she died. In the 1950s Personnel practices were different, and the church began arranging dates between the Organist and my father, and they spent 50 years together.

My Calling has been different, instead of brand new congregations in new communities, my Calling has been to existing churches where something happened that has gotten us off track, and we need to be loved, to rebuild our faith, and grow afresh. We have been very successful with this, numerous million dollar building campaigns, installing an Organ, Missions But about a year ago, a small group of leaders decided I had gotten Old, do you know how humbling and humiliating it is when your are called Old? So I left and have been searching for a new church to love and be loved by, as we demonstrate God’s love to the world. I thought I understood these passages so very well, but this experience has been humbling and humiliating, as suffering produced endurance, and endurance produced character, and character has produced hope.

I once received a letter from a 7 year old, who said “My brother and I know all about Santa and the Easter Bunny. But what is the difference between Jesus and a Superhero?” I thought this was a great question, and responded, “As I understand it Superman is a Cartoon, stronger and faster than a locomotive, while Kryptonite can weaken him, Superman can never die. Jesus is real. Jesus is just like all of us. He

loves us, and he died for us, but his love is stronger than death. So even though he could die, death was not the end.”

On a Saturday night, a 16 year old and two friends got drunk, drove his father’s Ferrari through the downtown at 115 miles per hour. When the car flipped, one friend was dead, a second quadriplegic, and the driver walked away unharmed. A month later a family joined the church having their 6 children aged 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11 baptized. As part of baptisms, I carry infants through the Sanctuary for the congregation to claim the child, so that day we had a bit of a parade. When I stopped before the 16 year old and gave him the baby to carry, as I continued to describe that throughout his life we would be praying for this Child of God. Which child, the infant or 16 year old, did not matter, as both were baptized and claimed and in need of our prayers, love and support, that day and for years to come.

After the Baptism, I called the children to the Chancel, and 3 year old Christopher, raised his hand “Rev. Lindsey, Rev Lindsey, God died!” I said, “Yes Christopher, that is important and we will learn more about that.” Every week for 6 months, the children would come forward and Christophe shouted: “Rev. Lindsey, Rev. Lindsey, God died!” Then one Sunday, I thought I was all prepared, when he called out “Rev. Lindsey, Rev. Lindsey” and I said “Yes, Christopher.” And he announced, “My Mom got stopped by the Police on the way to Worship.” The following week, all six children were there with Mom and Dad, and Grandma. Christopher’s hand shot up and he called out “Rev. Lindsey, Rev. Lindsey, I got New Socks!” Following the Worship service, I learned that Grandpa had been on Hospice care and recently died. While no one had spoken with the children, Christopher had seemed to know that his Grandfather was dying, and his questions about God were his way of working this out. The next Sunday, when Christopher said “Rev. Lindsey, Rev. Lindsey” I responded “Yes Christopher, and you know that even though Jesus died for us, death could never stop God’s love, so Jesus came back in wonderful ways.”

One of the items in your JAG report was that you have been working on Family Systems theory, I have been studying this and Conflict resolution for the last 20 years, engaged in intensive course work for the last five years. What I love about this is it explains the Bible VERY well. Adam and Eve got along great, until the Serpent came along, suddenly there was Blaming, Triangulation, Projection, and Cut-Offs, the ultimate Cut-off being Death. But asking WHY does not give answers. Instead, after our period of mourning, we need to realize like Nicodemus, some things are beyond explanation. Life happens. Tragedy happens. But afterwards there comes a new life, a richer reality, because we know we are loved. And living together after death, after sorrow, can become a whole new celebration of life.

Personally, I think the greatest of sins is to Bore God and bore people in the worship of God. Worship is a time of celebration! Whether we are celebrating the life of an individual, or the love of a couple, or engaging in new challenges and opportunities. When I was a child, my parents often had parties at our home, and while they were cooking and finishing things for the celebration, our responsibility was to greet the

guests and welcome them, until the hosts were ready. That is what worship is all about. God is the host. We are here to make one another welcome, to engage and love and care for others' needs until the host arrives. And throughout Christian tradition, the bread of communion, the body of Christ has been identified as the Host.

You have been through some really hard years, and taken these seriously, we will continue to do so, but I hope we can also laugh together and celebrate together, because God died, but death could not contain God's love, and besides we can have new socks!