**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, August 20, 2017, 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Accompanist Marjorie G. McKenzie**

302 Have Thine Own Way, Lord!

511 RH O God of Earth and Altar

310 RH Take My Life and Let It Be!

**Call to Worship (please see bulletin)**

**Prayer of the Day**

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)**

 *~silence~* **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 133**

**Prayers of the People**

We call on you with thanksgiving, Lord of heaven and earth,
and we come before you with all our heart.
We set you apart as the one deserving of all our praise,
and we call on your love and faithfulness
for the sake of your name.

We call to you, trusting that you will answer.
We pray for all who are sick, suffering, or struggling;
O Lord, increase the strength of those who are weak.

We pray for those who govern nations and hold power in the world;
speak your words of wisdom and justice, and let there be ears to hear.

We pray for those whose gifts of beauty and skill
give glory to your name and joy to others;
guard them my your mercy.

Lord God most high, we pray for those who are weighed down
by injustice, violence, or fear;
lift up the lowly and bring forth justice.

We call on you for ourselves,
in the midst of whatever trouble we may find ourselves in.
Walk along with us and guide us in your service.
O Lord, make good the purposes for which you have called us;
we trust in your enduring love,
made real for us in Jesus Christ,
who taught us to pray, saying:

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Time Out for Teaching: Understanding the Psalms**

**Genesis 45:1-15**

1Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, “Send everyone away from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. 2And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. 3Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph. Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

4Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come closer to me.” And they came closer. He said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. 8So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. 10You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. 11I will provide for you there: since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.’ 12And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you. 13You must tell my father how greatly I am honored in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” 14Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. 15And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

**Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32**

1I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! I myself am an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham, a member of the tribe of Benjamin. 2aGod has not rejected his people whom he foreknew.

... 29for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. 30Just as you were once disobedient to God but have now received mercy because of their disobedience, 31so they have now been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now receive mercy. 32For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.

**Matthew 15:21-28**

21Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. 22Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, “Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon.” 23But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, “Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us.” 24He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” 25But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” 26He answered, “It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.” 27She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” 28Then Jesus answered her, “Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

**Sermon: A Fair to Remember**

How very good and pleasant it is, when kindred dwell together in unity! So says the Psalm this morning.

Yes, it can be very good and pleasant, when all is well, everyone gets along and we all treat each other with kindness and respect. Those are the moments that strengthen our faith.

This year the County Fair has been a fair to remember. Mostly because in many ways I could see that Psalm at work in us. You could say that it was less organized or complain that the usual people couldn’t help or that no one signed up to work at the fair. Or you could see that new people were involved, we actually had a face to face planning meeting, and that very creative individuals pitched in with crafty projects to share with our passing visitors. It was a fair to remember!

You never know for sure how this fair business is going to work out until that very night when a bunch of us miraculously appear and help out. And that’s because we are a complicated people. We have lives beyond the church, illnesses, families or jobs which call us out of town. Life is complicated. But when we respect this fact, then we have room for forgiveness and grace to prevail, and this shows not just on the photos on the big board at the fair, we feel it on the inside too.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell together in unity.

You might not see yourselves like I do, but you are more united than other churches, you are kinder to each other than other churches, you are more like family than some other churches. And above all, you try to understand each other, you have wisdom and love enough to know that there is more to a person than meets the eye.

Joseph and his brothers probably had to gain a bit of wisdom and understanding of each other over the many years they were apart, before they could do what you do. And it wasn’t until his brothers were brought to their knees in starvation, begging in the land of Egypt, that we see their hearts were open to a reunion with Joseph. They were hungry.

When they came to beg, they didn’t immediately recognize their brother, the one they had thrown into a pit and sold as a slave. But he recognized them. He probably would have struggled on the inside, facing the temptation to send them away empty-handed.

But instead, he eventually he reveals to them his identity. And it was a beautiful reunion.

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell together in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down upon the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down over the collar of his robes.
It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.

So let me say more about what the Psalmist is saying about unity. Unity is ordained by God. Unity is a holy calling to pursue with our kindred – with those in our family but also those in our family of faith. It is a holy calling to seek forgiveness and give grace. It is our priesthood, for which God has marked us, just as is the precious oil that marked Aaron, Moses’ brother, was marked with precious oil to serve Israel as a priest.

Joseph saw his life, all of the pain and struggle leading up to this holy moment to serve a purpose beyond himself – a chance to pursue unity with his brothers. He saw his time in Egypt as more than being a time of exile. He no longer saw himself as just a victim, but an instrument of God’s grace. And when those brothers of his came begging, he knew it was his time, to confer like a priest, mercy – on his own people.

How very good and pleasant it is!

There is a hunger in our world today. Surely we have a hunger problem for food, but we also have a famine of grace. There is a hunger to see forgiveness at work. So much so there is even a group called “The Forgiveness Project,” which collects stories of forgiveness and how people managed to forgive others for truly atrocious acts. One of my favorite stories is about Tim and Matthew. Matthew was gay teenager in LA when he was jumped by a bunch of neo-Nazi skinheads. Tim was the one who kicked him in the head with his boot. Matthew and Tim met after Tim had reformed himself while both of them were volunteering at the Museum for Tolerance. Not too much time passed before Matthew realized who Tim was. After a lot of time spent together, they made a short film about how they were able to become friends and Tim says, “To tell the truth, I don’t if I could forgive somebody the way he’s been able to forgive me.”

I am happy to see such forgiveness take place. Is that not what we too are all about? Forgiveness. Friendship. Unity. The sweetness of it all. Let us savor that today wherever God sends us. If Matthew can forgive Tim, we can surely do it. For we are a part of the holy priesthood to which every person is called, and it is our way to feed the world’s hunger. Praise be to the Lord Jesus Christ, whose grace is sufficient for us all. Amen.

**Announcements:**