**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, December 10, 2017, 2nd Sunday of Advent**

BH 8 Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates Nancy Mueller, Accompanist

BH 5 Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

RH 151 Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus

**Announcements**

**Lighting the Candle of Peace Marjorie and Kenna McKenzie**

We light the candle of Peace as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

**In Christ there is life and light for all people.**

Now lift up your heads and rejoice: your redeemer is drawing near.

Prepare the way of the Holy One! All flesh will see the salvation of God.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth!**

**Prayer of the Day**

God of hope and peace,

We say we are ready for your peace,

But are we?

As we approach you this morning,

Refresh our hearts with your peace.

Help us set aside the many other thoughts that distract us from truly worshiping you this morning,

And open us up to the new vistas that come from your forgiveness and love.

Help us see with new eyes the glory of your Son our Lord’s birth into this world in need of hope.

And make us again your instruments of peace.

In the name of Jesus, Immanuel, God with Us.

Amen.

**Call to Confession**

John the Baptist tells us to, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” So we clean our homes and put out the decorations.

He says, “make his paths straight.” So we put up a Christmas tree and hang stockings.

He proclaims, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me.” So we buy gifts and attend parties.

But these things don’t prepare us for the coming Christ, as much as it does for us to simply pray for his forgiveness. Let us pray . . .

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

**Assurance of Pardon**

My friends, this is the good news of Jesus Christ: God offers us grace for our mistakes and errors, and calls us to reconcile with one another. In Christ, we have hope for true and just peace.

**Just as God forgives us, so we too shall forgive each other. Thanks be to God!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

God of comfort, come gently among us this evening; hear our prayers, restore our souls.

Piece together our loose ends; smooth over our rough edges; restore our souls.

When lights and decorations fail to delight our senses, and serve only to deepen our pain and grief, restore our souls.

When we clench our fists in anger, open our hands to receive your grace.

When we are worn out and beat down, surround us with your peace.

When our doubts outweigh our hopes, increase our faith.

When we have no energy left to love, love us all the more.

When we cannot bring ourselves to pray, pray for us, as we remember how Jesus prayed, saying… OUR FATHER…

**Time Out for Teaching:** **Christmas Promise of Peace**

“How silently, how silently, the wondrous Gift is giv’n. So God imparts to human hearts the blessings of His heav’n. No ear may hear His coming, but in this world of sin, where meek souls will receive Him still, the dear Christ enters in…” (“The Glory of Christmas”)

To me, this song imparts to our human hearts a promise of peace.

What is peace?

Peace is an inner peace and an outer peace.

Can we have peace even if we are surrounded by turmoil?

Can we look about and see peace but not feel it inside of us?

Is grace the very heart of peace or is there something more? Grace, being the activity of forgiving others and also knowing we are forgiven.

**Isaiah 40:1-11**

1   Comfort, O comfort my people,
          says your God.
2   Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
          and cry to her
     that she has served her term,
          that her penalty is paid,
     that she has received from the Lord’s hand
          double for all her sins.

3   A voice cries out:
     “In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,
          make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
4   Every valley shall be lifted up,
          and every mountain and hill be made low;
     the uneven ground shall become level,
          and the rough places a plain.
5   Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed,
          and all people shall see it together,
          for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.”

6   A voice says, “Cry out!”
          And I said, “What shall I cry?”
     All people are grass,
          their constancy is like the flower of the field.
7   The grass withers, the flower fades,
          when the breath of the LORD blows upon it;
          surely the people are grass.

8   The grass withers, the flower fades;
          but the word of our God will stand forever.
9   Get you up to a high mountain,
          O Zion, herald of good tidings;
     lift up your voice with strength,
          O Jerusalem, herald of good tidings,
          lift it up, do not fear;
     say to the cities of Judah,
          “Here is your God!”
10  See, the Lord GOD comes with might,
          and his arm rules for him;
     his reward is with him,
          and his recompense before him.
11  He will feed his flock like a shepherd;
          he will gather the lambs in his arms,
     and carry them in his bosom,
          and gently lead the mother sheep.

**2 Peter 3:8-15a**

8But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. 9The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. 10But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed.

11Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, 12waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? 13But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.

14Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; 15aand regard the patience of our Lord as salvation.

**Mark 1:1-8**

1The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

2As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,
     “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
          who will prepare your way;
3   the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
          ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
          make his paths straight,’”
4John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

The grass withers, the flower fades;
          but the word of our God will stand forever.
This is the word of God.

**Sermon: “Practice Makes Perfect”**

To be a champion, you have to practice. In fact, in order to be a champion, you have to do difficult things and prepare for any possibility. Olympic swimmer Michael Phelps is no exception. Richard Randals told me about this one… Phelps knows when you’re racing against an elite class of swimmers, you have to be ready for those moments when something goes wrong. You dive into the pool, and hit the water, - sometimes the seal around your goggles breaks and they fill up with water. It’s annoying, distracting, but the biggest problem is that water sloshing around your eyes affects your ability to see.

So what does he do? Well, he trains with water in his goggles, so he gets used to the problem. So when it does happen in a race, he doesn’t lose his cool.

We are all struck with disasters from time to time. And when we aren’t prepared for them, then our peace is threatened, we might lose our cool. But when we’re prepared, and we’ve trained well, then when that disaster hits, we are centered and we know what to do. This is true in all areas of life, not just disasters. It is true also when we are in conflict: if we’ve trained well, we are prepared to enter that conflict full of peace, and make peace.

Granted, just as Michael Phelps has to endure the discomfort and blindness of water in his goggles, we too are called to the uncomfortable practice of making peace. Peace is a necessary ingredient for making room for Jesus Christ to live in and work through us. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” He says, “For they shall see God.” Everyone knows the anxious feeling in the pit of our stomach when we are about to face someone in conflict. It’s not easy, it’s not supposed to be easy. Nor are we strangers to feeling blinded by fear or anger or pain and knowing that in that moment we still have to do the right thing, when there is an easier, less-than peaceful way. Peacemaking is a practice and the only way you can get good at it is by doing it. So even when our attempts are like a painful bellyflop, at least we’ve tried and can learn from our mistakes. For while peacemaking is a goal, it is also a discipline, or practice for the next chance we get to forgive or be forgiven.

It is why in worship we have a chance to repent before God and neighbor and seek forgiveness, for we are always in need of grace, always in need of practice. Because it’s hard to do.

John the Baptist calls for repentance as a necessary means to preparing for God’s arrival. Our gospel couples those famous lines from the prophets, “Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,” alongside the urgent call to repentance and baptism. Notice, this wasn’t a private one-on-one session with someone. This was a public service announcement to come to the riverside and it says “everyone” came. Who is “everyone” here I’m not entirely sure but we know that John sure drew a crowd! For all the world was called to repentance, to make peace with their Lord before He comes again. They were to turn from their ways of brokenness and towards the only one who can save them. It was an urgent matter and a public need. For even if peace begins with a right relationship between oneself and God, it is meant to be spread around.

Peacemaking is a public act, just as is our prayers of confession in this church, our worship services, and even when a person is baptized. Because when these things take place, they are good news, too good to hide. We get to bear witness to the extraordinary work that God is doing in our world through us. We celebrate them, because we know that they are difficult things to do. We celebrate them because others need to know that true peace is possible.

There are times when our attempts to fix broken relationships go about as badly as a bellyflop. But consider it a learning opportunity, and be at peace knowing you tried. 2nd Peter tells us today, “Strive to be at peace,” for it is our striving that will be rewarded and in striving we get better at it. It is a practice or discipline, just as much as it is a goal to be peacemakers.

So, we have to keep practicing. We are called to the difficult work. There will always be bellyflops and leaky goggles, but we press on, always preparing for that moment of victory. Every triumph, every success at peace, is reward enough to cover a host of bellyflops. So, strive to be at peace with your God and one another. This world needs your peace. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Next Sunday is Potluck Sunday!** Make sure you come next week, bring a dish to share, and enjoy a Christmassy fellowship dinner. All are invited.

Important Events:

**Christmas Cantata Performance** - Friday, December 15th @ Center Street United Methodist Church 7:00PM. Come early in order to secure a seat. Refreshments afterwards.

**White Elephant Christmas Party** – A gift exchange, Two Special Surprises (it was going to be just one but now it’s two!) and fun fellowship together, family-style. Bring a plate of treats to share and a mysterious gift to exchange. We might just do some caroling too.