**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, July 30, 2017, 17th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Call to Worship / Opening Prayer**

As we gather for worship, O Lord, help us let go . . .
**Of the things that trap us, the fears that silence us, the anger that haunts us.**
As we gather for worship, O Lord, help us let go . . .
**Of the worry, stress or anxiety that have filled us since the last time we gathered in your presence.**
As we gather for worship, O Lord, help us let go . . .
**Of grief, sadness, or a desire for something else.**
As we gather for worship, O Lord, help us pick up . . .
**The gift of your grace, your love and your life that fills us.**
As we gather for worship, O Lord, help us pick up . . .
**The gift of each other, the gift of this community, the gift of this time of worship.**
As we gather for worship O Lord, help us say together,
**We are here.  We are not alone.**
Jesus Christ is among us today.
**Alleluia!  Amen.**

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession**

**Creating and transforming God,
you call us to spread the joy of your kingdom
and live as agents of your renewal in the world.
We confess that we are content to locate your kingdom
in some other place, some other time, some other reality.
We have been unwilling to welcome your ever-present Spirit,
to strive for your justice in this world,
or to recognize the risen Christ in the face of others.
Forgive us.
Open our hearts, our minds, and our lives
to see the truth right in front of us.
Free us from our foolishness,
and teach us to live by your wisdom,
in Jesus’ name.** ~Silence~ Amen.

**Assurance of Pardon**

My friends, God hears your voice – whether you shout from the top of your lungs or whisper softly below your breath. God has already forgiven you for not listening – and is calling you to live this Good News through the Holy Spirit.

Friends, live and believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 128**

Happy is everyone who fears the LORD,

who walks in his ways.

**You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;**

**you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.**

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine

within your house;

your children will be like olive shoots

around your table.

**Thus shall the man be blessed**

**who fears the LORD.**

**The LORD bless you from Zion.**

May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem

all the days of your life.

**May you see your children's children.**

**Peace be upon Israel!**

**Prayers of the People**

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,
and your faithfulness soars over us like the clouds.
We call on your righteousness, strong as a mountain,
and your justice, deep as the ocean;
for humans and all that lives on the earth,
we call out for mercy.

Your love is immeasurable,
and we lift up all your people who seek to know you.
Gather us under the shadow of your wings
and unite us with each other by your grace.

We pray for those who count themselves excluded from life’s good things,
that they might feast upon the abundance of your house.
We pray for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness or healing,
that you would give them drink from the river of your delights.
We pray for those whose lives are in danger or at an end,
for with you is the well of life.

In your light let us see light,
and in your loving-kindness let us make you known;
we pray in the name of your Christ, saying together:

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Time Out for Teaching: Having a Bad Day?**

We are about to hear a story of Jacob, who is also known by God as “Israel.” The story is of how he meets the love of his life. BUT…the love of his life, Rachel, is the younger sister to Leah and Leah is not yet married. Jacob wants Rachel. But Rachel’s father, Jacob’s uncle, tells him that he has to work for him for 7 years first. And then the day comes when Jacob thinks that he is finally going to get to marry Rachel. That day was probably a bad day for him. For he finds out after 7 years of service, that he is not going to get Rachel but he has to marry her sister first!

Nothing against Leah, but she was not the one he was in love with. He loved Rachel. Bad day for Jacob.

But he persevered, which is what his nickname, Israel, really means. The name Israel is translated as “One Who Strives,” and it’s the name that God gave him. Jacob speaks up to his new father in law, explains the situation, and they strike a new deal: stay with Leah for 1 week, and you can marry Rachel as well, so long as you stay and work for another 7 years.

Have you ever had days like that? Working for your dreams and then to find that you’re not there yet and have to keep on working for them? Or maybe it’s the surprise of not getting the dream you had expected and getting something else instead.

Sometimes the stories of the Old Testament can sound rather like fairy tales of a world gone by. But this is a story we can all relate to. Jacob is having a pretty bad day. By extension, a pretty tough 7 years, only powered forward by the hope of marrying the woman he loves.

And maybe that’s the good news of the story – that our strivings be always motivated by love. Not only love for one another but love for doing what we feel God wants for us.

Many of our Old Testament stories tell us not always what people are supposed to do with their lives, but also just how people are sometimes. They are not always prescriptive, but descriptive of how bad things can get or how hard life can be for us, and even just how badly humans behave.

**Genesis 29:15-28**

15Then Laban said to Jacob, “Because you are my kinsman, should you therefore serve me for nothing? Tell me, what shall your wages be?” 16Now Laban had two daughters; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. 17Leah’s eyes were lovely, and Rachel was graceful and beautiful. 18Jacob loved Rachel; so he said, “I will serve you seven years for your younger daughter Rachel.” 19Laban said, “It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to any other man; stay with me.” 20So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her.

21Then Jacob said to Laban, “Give me my wife that I may go in to her, for my time is completed.” 22So Laban gathered together all the people of the place, and made a feast. 23But in the evening he took his daughter Leah and brought her to Jacob; and he went in to her. 24(Laban gave his maid Zilpah to his daughter Leah to be her maid.) 25When morning came, it was Leah! And Jacob said to Laban, “What is this you have done to me? Did I not serve with you for Rachel? Why then have you deceived me?” 26Laban said, “This is not done in our country — giving the younger before the firstborn. 27Complete the week of this one, and we will give you the other also in return for serving me another seven years.” 28Jacob did so, and completed her week; then Laban gave him his daughter Rachel as a wife.

**Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52**

31He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; 32it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

33He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

44"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

45"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

47"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; 48when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. 49So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous 50and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

51"Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." 52And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."

**Romans 8:26-39**

26Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. 30And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." 37No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

**Sermon: “Drawn Together”**

I always sort of felt sorry for Jacob in the story of how he gets hitched. He meets the woman of his dreams, is given the impression that if he works for 7 years for his uncle then he can marry her. But after 7 years of labor, to his surprise, after their wedding night, he wakes up and realizes he’s married her sister. Naturally, he complains. He discovers that in order to marry Rachel, he has to be with Leah for 1 week, and then promise to work ANOTHER 7 years. Surprise!

No offense to Leah, but imagine Jacob’s disappointment. One more problem to deal with after all those years of effort. He was not yet free to go on with his life. That’s life.

On the refrigerator of the church where I grew up, there was a magnet with a cartoon beaver on it. It said, “Will God ever give you more than you can chew? Gnaw.”

Comedienne Tig Notaro has a different take on this – in one of her comedy acts, she said, “We can always rest assured knowing that God never gives you more than you can handle. I can just imagine God saying, ‘I think she can handle just a little bit more.’ And the angels are saying, ‘God! What are you doing? Are you out of your mind?’”

She speaks from experience. At the age of 40 she spent a week in the hospital, in terrible pain with an infection that caused her to lose 20 pounds. About a week later, she got word that her mother had fallen, bumped her head and died soon after. Then, soon after a difficult breakup with her significant other, she goes to the doctor and they found breast cancer. All of these things happened in less than 6 months. She felt like she hardly had a chance to deal with one problem before another would come up. It was like being in a dark tunnel and not being able to see the light. As someone who writes jokes and performs for a living, she wondered how she work in times like these?

In times like these, our Scriptures call us to patience and perseverance. When things are piling up around us patience and perseverance do not come naturally, which is precisely why we must cultivate them. The Roman church was familiar with bad things happening to them. They lived in a time of great anxiety. Not only were they living with the “usual” stuff of life, they were also pursued and persecuted for their faith. Paul asks, “If God is for us, then who is against us?” Well, that was just to grab their attention. His listeners might have laughed. For, to the question, “If God is for us, then who is against us?” the obvious answer was “Everyone!” It must have felt like everyone was against them, some just because they believed God was for them. And then Paul names many of the things which seem to always be working against them: “Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?” Nothing, he says, none of these things can separate us from God’s love. None of these things, even though they are more powerful than we are, can separate us from God’s love. Why? Because God is more powerful. The Love of Christ is more powerful than even death. Even if the Romans felt like the whole world was against them, God was still working to draw them closer-

To each other and to God.

Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. When we find ourselves in moments of grave fear or danger – those are the times when we may least feel God’s presence – because we are so scared or overwhelmed. Remembering God’s gracious love for us, we can tell ourselves that God is carrying us. Remember the footprints story – of the man who dreamed he is walking with Jesus in the sand. Looking behind them he saw times in his life – the hardest times of his life – when there was only one pair of footprints. And as they walked, he asked Jesus, “Why is it I see only one pair of footprints in those times when I needed you most?” Jesus answered him, “Those were the times I was carrying you.”

God carries us through. God’s love is meant to draw us closer to Him and each other so that when we come out of those times when Jesus was carrying us, we shall on day be able to speak more confidently in our praise of Him.

Look at Jacob’s experience. He ends up being blessed with two wives – a true blessing in those times when family was all you had. And also look at our new comedienne friend, Tig Notaro. She said that when she took a moment to look at all the bad things that happened to her in that short space of time, something made her laugh at all of it. She laughed because it was so much bad news it was ridiculous. She began to write jokes about the silly things that happens when your mom dies and you get cancer. She began to tell people in her comedy routine, “I’m Tig Notaro and I have cancer. It’s okay. Well, it might not be okay. But you’re going to be okay.” And her audience felt permission to laugh, courageously to find humor with her. She told them of her mother’s death – and that received a questionnaire from the hospital rate how her mother’s stay was. She checked the box, “Not great.”

Her performance was lauded for giving people permission to laugh even in the midst of suffering. To be honest with the pain and appreciate the complexity of serious illness.

I would say that it is in those moments when we are living by faith and not sight – those moments when we trust God is carrying us – moments of our greatest pain and failure are the greatest opportunities to discover about the depth of God’s love for us.

“If God is for us, then who is against us?” It doesn’t matter who or what is against us. What matters most is that God is for us. Amen.

**Announcements:**

The next Men’s Breakfast will be this Saturday at 8:00AM. Invite a friend to take along. You may RSVP to David Goldston at 403-7910.

Calling all Creative-Types! We need a few people to come help us put up our booth at the Quay County Fair on Tuesday, August 15th between 5 and 9PM. No matter whether you have a creative eye, or just good with a staple gun, you can be tall, short, or somewhere in between. God can use you. For more information, please speak with Julie Sursa at 461-3861.

Rummage Sale Drop Off Days will be Fri-Sat, August 25-26th. We need a few good women to be there to receive donations from the community. Spread the word!