**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**March 13, 2016 Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**11:00 a.m.**

**Rev. Amy Pospichal, Pastor Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

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

**Opening Prayer**

Lord, you are the fount of every blessing. We thank you for every blessing there ever was, is and shall be.

You are the Alpha and Omega, the one who saves, the one who leads us to new life.

Thank you for the new life you offer us.

We praise you today for the gifts we have received from your mighty and awesome hands. Today we remember and give thanks in hopes that you renew us in faith, strengthen us to serve and send us to proclaim your love wherever you will. In Christ Jesus our Lord we pray, Amen.

**\*Opening Hymn**

**Call to Confession**

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

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, in the name of the Jesus Christ, you and I are forgiven!
**Thanks be to God! Amen!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**\*Gloria Patri**

 **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen, Amen.**

**Psalm 126 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord, in times of great distress we should draw to you in our needs. But sometimes we end up running away to seek relief elsewhere. We pray you forgive us and renew in us our faith and connection to you, by your Holy Spirit.

These days have been so busy for us. We haven't had enough time to focus on you, even though it is Lent and we know we are supposed to seek deeper relationship with you. Help us in our agenda-setting and our clock-changing, in our future-planning. Help us to carve out a little time that we can devote just to you and you alone, for it is from you that we draw life. And in that time spent on you, we pray you renew us and remake us into your new creations.

Let your Spirit wash over us like waters across a desert, cause us to rejoice in you, as we remember with gratitude all you have done, and all you promise to do. And turn our hearts toward whatever is right, whatever gives life to our faith and the faith of others.

We pray now for others who are in need:

Lord Christ, we ask for you to hold our faith steady as we await your strength to return to us. This we pray, just as you taught your first disciples to pray, saying, "Our Father, who art in heaven...Amen."

**Time Out for Teaching: Confession and Awareness**

This is a good time for me to say something about confession. We are traditionally a "confessional" church. This means several things. First, our creeds become a basis for understanding faith. We have this book called the Book of Confessions, chock full of the testimony of Christians who came before use, from the Apostles' Creed and Nicene Creed, ancient statements of faith, all the way up to the Brief Statement of Faith, which was adopted in 1984, and now even more recently a statement of faith which comes from South Africa, called the Belhar Confession.

Confession means to say what we believe together – hence, the prefix "con" which is a latin prefix for "together."

We also confess our sins. Confession is both a personal and a corporate expression of our brokenness. A congregation often takes time out to speak to God as one body, for as a whole body of believers we sin together as one. We are guilty of certain things. When we pray together in church, we are praying as one body, just as much as we are as individual members of the body.

And it can lead us to greater awareness of ourselves and our mistakes. Why does this seem important to you?

**Isaiah 43:16-21**

16Thus says the LORD,

who makes a way in the sea,

a path in the mighty waters,

17who brings out chariot and horse,

army and warrior;

they lie down, they cannot rise,

they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:

18Do not remember the former things,

or consider the things of old.

19I am about to do a new thing;

now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

20The wild animals will honor me,

the jackals and the ostriches;

for I give water in the wilderness,

rivers in the desert,

to give drink to my chosen people,

21the people whom I formed for myself

so that they might declare my praise.

**Philippians 3:4B-14**

4bIf anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: 5circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee;6as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

7Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. 8More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. 10I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, 11if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

12Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

**John 12:1-8**

1Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.3Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

**Sermon "Stop! Look and Listen!" Rev. Amy Pospichal**

By her actions, Mary proclaims how important Jesus is to her. Perhaps it was because she was grateful that he raised her brother from the dead.

Lazarus is present at this meal, as are the disciples. Together they witness this grand gesture, as she lavishes Jesus with the fragrant essence of nard. Just imagine for a moment the extraction process of oil from a flower. I've read some places that it can a few tons of the spikenard flower (of the valerian family) to press out even just 8 ounces of nard. While we know that commercial perfumes are very expensive, this alabaster jar of nard with which Mary covers her Lord was worth 300 denarii! That was probably somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 dollars to us today.

It was an extravagant display of honor. Mary's actions surely create a stir among the people there, particularly Judas. What's ironic is Judas complains that it's a waste of money, ironic because it is stated that he was stealing from their common purse, moreover – he betrays Jesus for just a fraction of that – just a tenth of what the nard was worth.

Maybe Judas' complaint was a way to cover up his own sins. It seems like he understands less about Jesus than Mary did. He seemed unable to see the bigger picture – who Jesus is and what He was doing here. Mary and Martha believe in Jesus. Did Judas miss that part of the message that God was coming into this world to save him and us all? Or had he become afraid of Jesus' power? I hate to think that Judas missed the point so completely. I'm sure I'm not the only one here who sometimes wonders why Jesus recruited such a fearful and broken man to be one of the Twelve. Maybe we will never know, but understand this – Jesus recruits us, and we are broken too.

It's easy for us to stand in judgment, and to forget that this is also our story. As our prayer of confession says today, we are sometimes blind to what God is doing. Sometimes we cannot see what God is doing, and then are afraid to trust that God is doing a new thing. Sometimes we refuse to see what God is doing. Maybe we are afraid to see that God is doing a new thing because we know it will be so big and it will force us to change, and adapt to God's agenda. And it means we must rewrite our own agendas so we can fall in with God's.

I wonder what new thing God is doing in the church today. Many mainline churches like ours struggle with smaller numbers of members – it puts a pinch on the church's pocket book and other resources. It pushes us to think differently about what's possible with God's help. It's not just about the numbers, but whether we are spreading the Good News. I wonder what God is doing – by putting a squeeze on His own church, so we look and listen and discern God's agenda, so that there be renewal.

Perhaps you are feeling these days that there is some kind of "squeeze" on your own life. Something that forces you to take stock and consider: what does God want from me? What do I have to do to become that person? A common way many of us are squeezed is in time – we often complain we don't have enough of it. If things are falling through the cracks, or you often feel like you have the "deer caught in the headlights" look, maybe God wants to do a new thing in your life. There is the potential for relief, if and only if one is willing to adapt to God's plan, surrender to Him.

We all have our agendas. We have to, in order to fulfill our goals. But when they're not working that could be the sign for us to stop, honor God, and listen to what's truly important. Your surrender can lead you to renewal.

God speaks through Isaiah saying, "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert."

This is not only a promise for us at the end of days. It is a promise for this moment in time, a chance for a new and fresh beginning. And it can happen when we seek God's help, adjust own agendas, so we surrender to God's plan, the rhythm of life in the church and of our physical needs. Stop, look and listen and remember like Mary what is most important. Thanks be to God for the promise we have from Jesus Christ for the gift of renewal. Amen.

**\*Apostles’ Creed P 12 red hymnal**

**\*Closing Hymn**

**\*Benediction**