**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, October 23, 2016, the Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

**Call to Confession**

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

**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 65:1-13 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

God of love,

we depend on you for the very breath of life.

Your source of power and creativity knows no bounds and

Your depths are unknowable by our human minds.

Yet, who are we, that you should be mindful of us?

We are truly blessed that you have claimed us as your very own.

And so it is because you have called us children, we are unafraid to call you

Abba, Father, giver of all good things.

We call upon you in our times of need:

For this nation and all that depends upon peaceful and mindful living.

For our cities and small communities

For safety of all who are traveling this week

For this church preparing for the holiday season.

For people who are grieving those they love.

For our schools

We lift up at this time the people on our prayer list… (silence)

Loving God, it is in you we live and move and having our being.

Make us more mindful of your great love for the world,

More mindful of the ways you hold us by your providential hand.

Envigorate our faith that we accept the calling that comes from you

To serve, to love and to belong to you

We ask all this and more, in the name of the living Christ who taught us to pray, “Our Father…Amen.”

**Time Out for Teaching**

Some of you might remember that TV sitcom of the 1990s called “Friends.” Well, there was an episode where the tall blonde character, Phoebe, is trying to decide whether she should make a donation to the local PBS station. She can’t decide. She is trying to decide whether she is doing it for the wrong or the right reasons. She is sure that if she gives for the wrong reason somehow the universe is going to come back at her. She would like her reason for giving to be pure and free of her own desire for exaltation.

I’m not sure that it’s possible for us humans to ever be pure and free in our own good works. We can do good works for the wrong reasons, if it is simply so we can gain approbation and admiration from others. But they might still be good for whomever we are trying to help with our gifts.

I would like to consider what we need whenever we lay it on God – be they our gifts, or be it our prayers of confession. Sometimes it is God’s approval we truly seek in our gifts of money or ourselves. What do you think?

Perhaps it is important that we admit that we need God, as does the tax collector in the parable. He understands that he can never be fully free of a sinful life. So he admits that before God, praying for God to help him. Perhaps that is the purity God desires of us.

**2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

6As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

16At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! 17But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. 18The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Gospel Luke 18:9-14**

9He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

**Sermon: “Cookie Power”**

When in doubt, eat a cookie. If you’re sad, eat a cookie. If you know someone else who is sad, bake them cookies. If you want to tell someone you’re sorry, bring them homemade cookies. Cookies speak louder than words. Especially when they are made with the real ingredients like real chocolate, real butter. Especially the kinds that evoke memories when we nibble on them. Cookies are powerful ways to say what we mean, when we have no words.

As you know, I traveled to Guthrie, OK this week to attend a funeral for a very dear person. I have known her and her family for about 20 years. Her family is basically a part me. I couldn’t go without baking a batch of snickerdoodles – some of you have had them – a recipe which came from that family. And when I informed her husband that I had brought them, his sad face lit up with a big smile, and he said, “Oh, I haven’t had those for years!”

I believe one reason why the cookie is so powerful because it is so small. So much love comes from this little thing you can eat with one hand.

And, Friends, this is where we find ourselves in today’s Gospel lesson. For God brings holy power through forgiveness to those who make themselves small.

Jesus’ parable reads like a standard Rabbinic style. Two people on divergent life journeys: a righteous Pharisee and a sinful tax collector. Both men come to the Temple to pray. They both have something to say to God. But it’s what they say that differentiates one from the other. The first, a Pharisee, says the things a stereotypical Pharisee would say. He is sure of himself and feels justified to face God. He claims he has done all the right things and feels he isn’t like all those other people out there. You hear the problem with his reasoning? He’s setting himself to be humbled. If not soon, one day he shall be.

And the other guy, a tax collector, who has probably heard all his life how bad tax collectors are, perhaps didn’t intend to get into the business…he is the opposite stereotype. A fellow Jew who has been perceived by the general public as a crook. He makes his living off of collecting taxes for the Roman Empire, and does it by exacting more money from people than they actually owe, even from the poorest of society. Perhaps not all tax collectors were like this man, some were cutthroat, unsympathetic, but this one seems truly sorry and feels as though he does not deserve to even look up to heaven, nor stand anywhere near that Pharisee. He stands “far off” from others.

But where his heart stands is very close to God’s holiness, for he pours it out to God in prayer, makes himself humble and small. He knows he doesn’t deserve God’s love or forgiveness. He places himself under God’s judgment right then and there. And this is where Jesus reminds his listeners, “He who exalts himself, shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself, shall be exalted.”

There is power in humbling ourselves before God, not for the ultimate goal of wanting greatness, but only because we know how much we need help. Friedrich Schleiermacher once said that faith is when we realize that we are “utterly dependent on God.” He means utterly dependent – utterly dependent on all that we have in life, utterly dependent on God for what we have received, utterly dependent on God for salvation, for forgiveness, for teachings about right and wrong. Utterly dependent so that we realize we are to be like that tax collector, utterly dependent on God for holiness, exaltation, for none that we have received that is good, is deserved by us.

So, making space for God by becoming small enough to allow God to work in us, can unleash our appreciation for all that God has done for us. That involves recognizing how much we need God, how much we depend on Him. The Pharisee in this parable talked an awful lot about all his good works, almost oblivious to God’s power to save. He was oblivious to the fact that he needed the Lord too. The tax collector recognized that he was unable to save himself, understood that he was incapable of escaping evil and sin on his own power. So he makes room for God, recognizing his smallness.

When we do that, great things can happen. When we make room for God, God can use us as vessels of grace. When we make room for God, God’s works through us are made visible. That’s cookie power. Honesty, humility, smallness. So remember you have the ability, to make God’s power visible in your life, by making room for God to work in you. Amen.

**Announcements:**

Mark your calendar for Saturday, October 29th at 6:00PM for the First Presbyterian Church Halloween Party!

Our Nominating Committee is on the loose! Folks interested in being nominated as Elder or Deacon in 2017, please speak with Pastor Amy for more information. Training is available for those interested in serving, and for those who have served before.

Deacons have a planning meeting next Sunday, October 23rdat 9:30AM in the Library. An agenda will be available before the meeting. The purpose will be to look at what we’ve learned this past year, prepare for Christmas and talk about how to improve our work for the coming year. If you have an interest in being a Deacon, you are invited to come and observe.