**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 17, 2017, 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

**Loving God,**

**You are light to the hearts that know you,**

**Wisdom to those who seeks you**

**Comfort to those spirits in need**

**We praise you for you are all in all, our everything.**

**May our words and music today be**

**Acceptable to you, Almighty God,**

**May they be from our undeserving yet grateful hearts.**

**Through the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.**

**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 114:1-8**

When Israel went out from Egypt,   
          the house of Jacob from a people of strange language,

**Judah became God’s sanctuary,   
          Israel his dominion.**

The sea looked and fled;   
          Jordan turned back.   
**The mountains skipped like rams,   
          the hills like lambs.**

Why is it, O sea, that you flee?   
          O Jordan, that you turn back?   
**O mountains, that you skip like rams?   
          O hills, like lambs?**

**Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the LORD,   
          at the presence of the God of Jacob,**who turns the rock into a pool of water,   
          the flint into a spring of water.

**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.

For the peoples of Texas, Louisiana and Florida, we pray for them to experience your mercy and hope. For those who are there to help, them, protect them from illness, accidents and exhaustion.

For those who are seeing utter destruction from wildfires, we ask for you to bear your hope and help

For those of us who continue to live in the shadow of our memories of 9/11, we pray to see the light of a new day where you wipe away every tear and fear is no more.

For our first responders who continue to do their jobs, even when under heavy public scrutiny

For those who feel they have no voice in our nation, may your justice roll down like mighty waters.

For the many in our prayer list in need of help and healing…

For the comfort and peace of Zula Barnett..

For Don Wellborn’s continued healing after surgery…

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: Singing the Psalms**

**Exodus 14:19-31**

19The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. 20It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

21Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. 22The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 24At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

26Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.“ 27So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. 29But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

**Romans 14:1-12**

1Welcome those who are weak in faith, but not for the purpose of quarreling over opinions. 2Some believe in eating anything, while the weak eat only vegetables. 3Those who eat must not despise those who abstain, and those who abstain must not pass judgment on those who eat; for God has welcomed them. 4Who are you to pass judgment on servants of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand.

5Some judge one day to be better than another, while others judge all days to be alike. Let all be fully convinced in their own minds. 6Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.

7We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. 8If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord’s. 9For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living.

10Why do you pass judgment on your brother or sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. 11For it is written,   
     “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me,   
          and every tongue shall give praise to God.”   
12So then, each of us will be accountable to God.

**Matthew 18:21-35**

21Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” 22Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

23“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

**Sermon: The World is Flat**

Every year about this time I take a look around the backyard at those deep dark purple fruits on the prickly pear and I wonder – should I pick them and make something out of them? I have always wanted to try cooking with prickly pear, or make jelly or something out of them. And so far, I still haven’t done it. For if you pick the fruits, you have to very careful to remove all of the cactus spines. So I haven’t. Because I’m a chicken.

So, because I’m a chicken, I let the insects and birds pick away at that fruit. But there are so many other things that I can be grateful for: I have my health. My family both in Virginia and right here in this church. I live in a beautiful place. I have had my share of trouble but I am also very lucky.

Gratitude is an attitude.

Gratitude is not mentioned. However, I still believe it is an operative principle in the parable Jesus tells us. If the servant had been more grateful, to have been forgiven his 10,000 talent debt, then maybe he would have showed the same kindness to his fellow servant. After all, his fellow servant only owed a fraction of what he himself had owed his lord. He clearly knew he had just been released from an enormous debt, but he was too focused on himself to think of his fellow servant.

While we are a roomful of good and kind and generous people, who last week donated $333 to the hurricane relief efforts in the Southeast, who give so much of themselves in many other ways, it may be hard to think of how to put ourselves in the shoes of that unforgiving servant. We might have at times felt like the other servant, done wrong by others. Or, if you are a mom or a dad, a teacher you might be able to identify with that lord character, who could see the behavior of both servants and wishes they would just care about each other! And it is from the lord’s point of view that we might be able to imagine perhaps the point of view God has of us all in this story. From God’s point of view, we are all subjects – beloved subjects, mind you – but subjects nonetheless, in God’s kindom. We belong to God, whether in life or in death.

Notice that the lord in Jesus’ parable expects the first servant to forgive the other servant just as he had forgiven him. And is greatly disappointed to see that the second servant is not given the same consideration that the lord gave to the first. Had that first servant realized that it wasn’t just about looking out for number 1, had he also recognized that he was only free of debt because of the kindness and graciousness of his lord, then maybe he would have been moved to do the same for his fellow servant.

Second, notice that even though he had been freed from his 10,000 talent debt, his job title as “servant” is retained. Jesus is telling a parable and his word choice matters much in what he is seeking to teach us. Not only is this “freed” servant still a servant, the second servant who owes him 100 denarii is a “fellow” servant, which means that in Jesus’ eyes, they are equals. One is not more important than the other.

What if we really took this point of view seriously and put that into practice? Equals in the sight of God. Equally deserving of God’s grace, because none of us really deserve it. Equally loved. Would we treat strangers with the same magnitude of welcome as we would treat a friend? Would we respect a homeless person with the same care as we do a rich person? If we filled this world with humble and grateful people, maybe we would better practice what Jesus preached: forgiveness.

Remember these words we often hear around Christmastime? “‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth;”

John the Baptist proclaims these words of the prophets, using them as his call to the world to repent. John was not proposing a remodeling of the earth’s landforms so everything is flat. He is talking about God’s plan for the remodeling of our hearts, to see each other as humans, all of us subjects of God’s kingdom, all of us recipients of God’s grace.

The world is flat. One lord, the rest servants. All of them belonged to that lord, who showed grace to one, expecting it to be passed on to each other. In the words of Biblical Scholar, Raymond E. Brown, “all this has very real application in church life, for the number of people who turn away from the church where they have not found forgiveness is legion.” (p 193)

Many of us know at least one person who has left the Church because they expected to find grace where there was none to be found. And it is heartbreaking.

This is a matter of the heart. Jesus sums it up at the end: “So my heavenly father will do to everyone of you if you do not forgive your brother or sister from the heart..” It’s an attitude, and approach to life and the problems that come with it. We are all servants in the same kingdom, all of us very lucky to have received grace. Amen.

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| |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | | |  | | --- | |  | | |  | | --- | | Hurricane Irma, a record-setting storm, is now dissipating, but the devastation is just starting to be known.   Members of PDA’s National Response Team will arrive in Florida, Georgia and South Carolina this week to provide aid, assess damage, and offer spiritual and emotional care for those impacted by the winds and flooding. While PDA has already been in contact with presbyteries throughout Florida and Puerto Rico, the Church remains mindful of the areas where contact has, so far, been difficult to make. Once the information arrives from the Florida Keys as well as the Caribbean islands nearly wiped from the map, the destruction of this storm will begin to be fully known.   There are years of recovery ahead. Will you help extend the hands of Christ by standing in the GAP? — Give. Act. Pray. | | | |

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