**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 24, 2017, 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**41 RH When Morning Gilds the Skies Accompanist Marjorie G. McKenzie**

**135 RH Fairest Lord Jesus**

**522 BH Lord, When I Came Into This Life**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open,

all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid;

cleanse the thoughts of our hearts

by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,

that we may perfectly love you,

and worthily magnify your Holy Name;

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

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

**Assurance of Pardon**

**The prophet Jonah: “**I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity”

God hears our prayers and forgives our sin.

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 145:1-8 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Almighty and most merciful God, from whom comes every good gift, we give you praise and hearty thanks for all your mercies: for your goodness that created us, your bounty that sustains us, your discipline that corrects us, your patience that has borne with us and your love that has redeemed us. Grant us with your gifts a heart to love you, and enable us to show our gratitude for all your benefits, by giving up ourselves to your service and delighting in all things to do your blessed will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Time Out for Teaching: God Fearers**

This morning I would like to begin a little series of Teachings along the line of Church history, as we head into Fall and up to the 500th anniversary of… The Protestant Reformation.

God fearers were people who attended worship and teachings in the synagogues during the first century. They were not Jews, but they were interested in learning about the Lord. It was very difficult to join the Jewish religion however.

These were people who had a conviction in their hearts about the Jewish God. So, as our Christian faith was still regarded as a subset of the Jewish faith, these God fearers were able to be exposed to Christianity in its infancy. Their exposure to the Christian faith opened the door for the apostles to consider including the Gentiles. There is plenty of writing in Paul’s letters and in Luke’s Acts of the Apostles where the Gentile question is being discussed. Paul says in the letter to the Galatians that in Jesus Christ we are called to a circumcision of the heart, even if there is no circumcision of the flesh.

Are there still God Fearers today? What do you think? Perhaps the person who tells you, “I believe in a higher power, I just don’t go to church…?” The Ninevhites were God Fearers I think. We will be reading from Jonah later where Jonah reluctantly goes to Nineveh (modern Iraq) and tells them that God will overthrow the city in 40 days if they do not repent of their sins. Jonah was a Jew, an Insider, and he hated the Ninevhites. But after some catastrophic events, he finds himself there to fulfill the mission. The Ninevhites respond appropriately and God spares the city.

God-Fearing people are always around us. They are the ones who are most likely to open their hearts to God’s mercy. Remain open to wherever they may be found.

**Philippians 1:21-30**

21For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain. 22If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which I prefer. 23I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better; 24but to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you. 25Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith, 26so that I may share abundantly in your boasting in Christ Jesus when I come to you again.

27Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, 28and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God’s doing. 29For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well — 30since you are having the same struggle that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

**Matthew 20:1-16**

1“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**Jonah 3:10-4:11**

**10**When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.

1But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. **2**He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. **3**Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

**4**But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

**5**Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. **6**Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. **7**But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. **8**When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”

**9**But God said to Jonah, “Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?”

“It is,” he said. “And I’m so angry I wish I were dead.”

**10**But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. **11**And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?

**Sermon: Sour Grapes**

Jonah is cranky. Bless his heart. He’s got a case of the sour grapes. He just knew that those awful Ninehvites would be given a chance to be saved. He said it himself: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love.” But Jonah isn’t saying this in praise of the Lord. It’s a complaint.

Let’s just say, Jonah doesn’t like Nineveh – in his opinion, they are outsiders to the Jewish faith. They worship idols. They don’t deserve God’s mercy. Nineveh was located in Mesopotamia, what is today the country of Iraq. Father Abraham was from Mesopotamia, but the Ninevhites were not a part of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, so Jonah had already judged them undeserving of God’s mercy.

Jonah was so prejudiced against Nineveh, he tried to avoid going there as God’s prophet. To avoid God’s calling, he hops on a boat to Tarshish, only to end up in the belly of a big fish! After much pleading, God seems to give the fish some kind of indigestion to spew him out of there! I guess it’s better than the alternative. But God’s “scared straight” tactics with Jonah are not enough to move his heart to compassion.

We might laugh a little at Jonah’s childishness and selfishness. But our giggles might be our way of distancing ourselves from the true message. See, we too get cranky when we see someone receive grace when we don’t think they deserve it. You can probably think of a time when you felt resentment towards someone enjoying the good things of life when you know they didn’t work hard for it. We Insider Church people question folks who come to our doors and wonder – why are they asking for handouts when they have a nicer car than I do? We are frustrated trying to be kind to neighbors when we remember the bad things they did in the past. These types of people and others can make us feel cranky – sour grapes – for we know God loves them as much as He loves us. And we don’t like it.

In the words of Jill Duffield, editor of the Presbyterian Outlook: “We care deeply about fairness. More accurately, we care deeply about perceived fairness toward us. We spend an inordinate amount of time sizing up whether or not people are deserving, worthy and appropriately appreciative. We devote lots of time and energy into assessing measurable results and the impact of our ‘generosity.’” What she means is when we hear stories like Jonah’s and the parable that Jesus told us of the latecomers to the vineyard, we assume we’re the first ones to show up, worked the hardest and longest, the most deserving in comparison to those latecomers.

Duffield was writing about Jesus’ parable. But it applies to Jonah and Nineveh too. Jonah himself proves that he is no more special than the Ninevites, as he ungratefully, angrily plunks himself down on the east side of the city, to see what will happen to them. It turns into a sulking session. After God gives him time and some shade for comfort to sit and sulk a while. And then the Lord confronts him: “Is it right for you to be angry?” and “Should I not be concerned for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?” The book of Jonah ends there with that question. Interesting way to end the book, isn’t it?

And maybe that’s just what we need to hear. Perhaps hang onto God’s questions the next time we feel an oncoming case of the sour grapes. Is it right for us to feel cranky? Is it right for us to withhold grace, when it’s not ours to begin with? God so freely shares it with us, even when we sulk like Jonah.

In David McCullough’s biography on Harry S. Truman, it was noted that during the year 1945, “it’s remarkable how much could be accomplished if you didn’t care who received the credit.” The biography stresses for its readers that during the Truman presidency, there was an atmosphere of non-competitiveness, that it didn’t matter who completed a project, so long as they focused on getting it done. It mattered not who came up first with a good idea but that worked on it together. Maybe that is a lesson for Jonah and for us. What matters most is that we work together for grace to abound – to open doors for God-fearing people like those Ninevhites to know of His mercy. It is not about who is inside and who is outside, it is not for us to consider who came first and who came last, but all are equally loved by God, parent to us all.

For those of us who have been around the church a long time, we must remember we weren’t first – there was always someone else before us. It is by God’s grace that any of us are here at all. Next time you feel a case of the sour grapes, ask yourself, “Is it right that I should be angry?” Rather, let us rejoice to see God’s grace abound. Amen.