**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, August 18, 2019, Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**RH 378 My Faith Looks Up to Thee Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

**RH 111 O God Our Help in Ages Past**

**RH 310 Take My Life and Let It Be**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

We bring to you our full selves today, O God.

Help us to be open to see your handiwork in our daily lives.

Give us courage to declare your goodness,

And remove the obstacles that block our hearts from receiving your grace,

That in our worship, we may not only praise you with our lips, but with our whole hearts.

In Christ our Lord,

Amen.

**Call to Confession**

With humility and honesty, let us confess our sins to our God  
who is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

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

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, our salvation is not something that can be purchased with money or fame.  
Our salvation comes from Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.  
I announce to you this day, our sins are forgiven.

Friends, Believe the Good News of Jesus Christ.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

O Lord, we lift up our souls to you.  
We trust in you, because you are always faithful to your covenant.  
You never leave your people alone.

So we pray for the people on our hearts who are in need.  
We pray for those who are sick,  
for those who suffer or struggle,  
and especially for those who are lonely or hopeless.  
We pray for those we have lifted up by name…  
O Lord, we put our hope in you.

Teach us to serve you, loving God,  
and make us faithful to your call.  
Open our hearts and minds to know your truth,  
and shape our actions to live into your covenant.  
Hold us gently, in your eternal mercy.  
Set us free from sin and look at us only with your love.

We dedicate our efforts, skills, and interests to your work,  
in this congregation and everywhere we go.  
Let our lives show your good news to the world, O Lord.  
Let us feed, serve, and lift up your people in need.  
Bind us to each other as your beloved people,  
called together in Jesus’ name.  
We pray together as he taught us, saying:  
*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Time Out For Teaching: Meet the Hebrews**

The letter to the Hebrews is a fascinating one. Unlike most letters in the New Testament, Hebrews offers us virtually no information on the situation of the letter. In other words, there is no clear historical context. Everything we can understand about the situation must be based only on the style of argumentation. It is written in Greek, a high-quality of Greek. We believe it was written between the 60s and 80s. It sends greetings from “those from Italy,” which is pretty vague, compared to Paul’s letters. It is written to Christians, who seem attracted to the Jewish faith, but we’re not too sure where these Christians were, probably Jerusalem or Rome.

The Letter to the Hebrews begins with telling us about the superiority of Jesus over all, over the angels, over Moses, and his position as High Priest and Lamb at the same time. This section discussing the greatness of Jesus through all these things runs from chapters 1-10, before exhorting us all to receive Jesus as our priest. Then, chapters 11-12, which we’ve been reading off and on this summer, is where we find ourselves today. It gives examples of faith from the Old Testament, including Abraham. So here is something that I think is very interesting. It says that Abraham was reckoned by God as a righteous person, righteousness here defined as someone who is faithful and trusting God.

This letter may be considered one of the most eloquently-written in the New Testament, where we find many phrases like, “Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever.” (13:8) “Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses…” as a means of reminding us that we are not alone on this walk of faith. We have the stories and lessons from those many righteous people from old, in a way, stored in a cloud of wisdom and grace.

Hebrews is not an easy letter to read but takes a lot of time to study. It is a beautiful and uplifting one. Check it out.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Luke 12:49-56**

49"I came to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! 50I have a baptism with which to be baptized, and what stress I am under until it is completed! 51Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division! 52From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; 53they will be divided: father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

54He also said to the crowds, "When you see a cloud rising in the west, you immediately say, 'It is going to rain'; and so it happens. 55And when you see the south wind blowing, you say, 'There will be scorching heat'; and it happens. 56You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time?

**Hebrews 11:29-12:2**

29By faith the people passed through the Red Sea as if it were dry land, but when the Egyptians attempted to do so they were drowned. 30By faith the walls of Jericho fell after they had been encircled for seven days. 31By faith Rahab the prostitute did not perish with those who were disobedient, because she had received the spies in peace.

32And what more should I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets-33who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, 34quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.35Women received their dead by resurrection. Others were tortured, refusing to accept release, in order to obtain a better resurrection. 36Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37They were stoned to death, they were sawn in two, they were killed by the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, persecuted, tormented-38of whom the world was not worthy. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground. 39Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

1Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, 2looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

**Sermon: It’s in the Cloud**

50 years ago this weekend, clouds opened up on 400,000 people on a farm in upstate New York. It was the Woodstock music festival, 1969, and the place became a muddy swamp, with almost half a million people tromping about on Farmer Yasgur’s property. Can you picture that hot mess…, and how much trash must have been left behind? Disaster aside, many people who choose an “alternative lifestyle” claimed it was the sign of a new age, the Age of Aquarius! With free love, all the drugs you might want, and music for three days, I suppose the additional mud and weather made it seem even more like an historic moment - to some people. I have been to music festivals, in the rain and there was one sure sign: Unplug the sound system before someone gets electrocuted!

It might have a sign of something. But not everyone agreed. Some were disgusted, turned off instead of turned on. Some people came to the festival to do good works, such as the folks from near Taos, who traveled to New York on a groovy-looking bus to set up a free kitchen for the hungry that weekend. So, maybe this was another sign, a mass feeding, slightly reminiscent of the feeding of the 5,000. Even in the most unlikely places, we can see evidence that humans can do good things for each other, when peace is their goal.

But a show of friendship at a concert is only one sign of God’s kingdom. There are many other signs of God’s kingdom not reflected there but reflected in other aspects of life. It’s a matter of interpreting what we see through the lens of Scripture, the words of the saints, looking for the best.

We try to read the signs of the times a lot. Jesus speaks of looking for signs of the coming of the Kingdom and challenges us to look deeper. He teaches us that not only should we be watchful for such signs, we have to be careful interpreters. And we live in times when we are continually awash in information and have to weigh it out carefully.

Sometimes - I confess this to be true – as a Christian person in this post-modern world, I become weary of trying to read the signs of the kingdom. The more I look at news and read the latest back-biting in the political world, and the more I hear regular everyday people who seem to have no regard for others, the more I just want to back away from it all. I drop out of Facebook sometimes and get tired of watching the news. Does anyone else feel that way sometimes? It is tempting, even for us people of faith, to drop out of the world, separate from it, and no longer have to engage with the issues of the day. And we do need a break from it; coming here is good way to get that rest.

But even people of Biblical times were weary like us. Even though they did not have Facebook or the 24-hour news cycle, the Early Christians were combating fear of many kinds, including fear of the Roman peace, fear of their neighbors. Christians were living life on the edge, in 1st century. Non-believers often regarded them with suspicion. Romans also resented and persecuted them for refusing to worship their gods. With so much fear and anxiety, no wonder they were anxious to see signs of Jesus’ return. It gets tiring.

We hunger for a sign – because we are looking for hope. Signs give us hope that even after tragedy we can find healing. Jesus tells us we are responsible for looking for signs and for interpreting them carefully, faithfully. But how do we interpret the signs of God’s kingdom, when we are mere subjects in God’s kingdom?

Faithfully, humbly, and carefully.

I believe interpreting the signs of God’s reign is harder than we think. Especially since we are also under and within God’s reign. The comparison Jesus uses to interpret the sky to tell whether it is going to rain is very interesting. Especially for those of us who wait and pray for rain. I usually expect it to rain just because it always seems to rain during the Quay County Fair. And it hadn’t yet. It rained other places but not here. Maybe predicting the weather isn’t so easy either! So, we are careful how we forecast it in percentages and analysis. And so we are also careful and humble in all other things we interpret.

Friends, we may become weary on this walk of faith, and maybe anxious about these times in which we live. We don’t know everything that God knows. But we can trust God with those things we do not understand. We can only look for what we know is right and good and call them signs of God’s kingdom already here. Our hope is in the Creator of Heaven and Earth. And it is that great cloud of witnesses who had faith before we were born.

When you feel weary or anxious and this world is getting you down, look for the signs that you know are good and right, remember the cloud of believers who came before you, and their patience and hope. We are not alone in this race. Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Today is Potluck Sunday!** Please stay after worship so we can share in food and fellowship.

**Thanks to you** all for your help with the Fair Booth this year. Nice work!