**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, December 15, 2019 3rd Sunday in Advent**

**BH 13 Prepare the Way Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

**RH 147 O Come, O Come Emmanuel**

**Insert: Hope Has Found Us (tune of RH 151)**

**Call to Worship**

The Advent journey continues.  
**Our decorations are out, and our calendars are filling up with holiday plans.**The light of Hope and Peace have guided us this little way.

**We need more light for the journey**So God’s family can rejoice with the fullness of God’s love,  
**Where all God’s Creation becomes new.**

God can and will make all things new. Friends:  
**Let us walk in the light of the Lord!**

**Candle of Joy/Prayer of the Day**

Come, Emmanuel.  
Days grow short and to-do lists lengthen.  
We watch and prepare, for the Word is coming, full of grace and truth.  
*~candle is lit~*  
**A spark of joy lights the way—  
Though the flame flickers against the shadows,  
We will rejoice in God’s covenant of everlasting love.**

**Let us pray:**

**All: Holy and compassionate God, your faithfulness in all things produces the harvest of our joy. We rejoice in You, always. Even in our seasons of doubt and darkness, we can find joy in the presence of Christ in our neighbors and the witness of the Holy Spirit in creation. Stir up our holy joy, that we may share it with all whom we encounter for the sake of Your gospel. Come, Lord Jesus. Amen.**

**Call to Confession**

**Confession  
God who comes where we least expect, your prophets spoke of the coming Messiah as new life growing in dry land, a desert teeming with flowers. Yet we forget the prophecy, and so in our own desolate landscapes see only poverty and despair, frustration and rejection. In this Advent, when we await Your coming, we confess our failure of imagination: our inability to believe You could possibly change the shape of the world.**

**And yet we know that You have come, long ago, to a forgotten corner of the world, to a people on the verge of losing hope, to a woman no one thought could bear a child, and the world has never been the same. Hear us as we pray, that we might find flowers in the desert and celebrate life where it seems impossible. May we look to the darkness of our time and discover there a Light like no other, waiting to shine in us, in whose name we pray.** (silence) **Amen.**

**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.**

**Responsive Reading: Luke 1:47-55**

“My soul magnifies the Lord,  
**and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.**Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
**for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.**His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
**He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.**He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
**he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.**He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
**according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”**

**Prayers of the People**

Beloved, we lift up prayers before God,  
trusting in the mercy of the One who comes to shepherd all people.  
Let us sing our prayers together:

Save your people, O Lord,  
and be especially present with those whom we have named before you.

Turn your face toward your people,  
and restore us in your mercy.

We pray in the name of the coming Christ,  
and we join in the prayer he taught, saying:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Special Music: “The Star Carol” Emily Priddy**

**Time out for Teaching: The Advent Candle of Joy**

**The Advent Candle of joy is a special color. Do you know why?**

**Joy is an interesting choice of words when we think about the situation of Mary…** Let’s think about that for a moment – about her situation before and then after the moment she is told she will be pregnant with the Messiah.

**What was Mary’s joy? And what does Mary do with her joy?** She sings the Magnificat – “my soul magnifies the Lord…” and she also holds many things in her heart.

**How do you find joy during this season?**

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Isaiah 35:1-10**

1   The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,  
          the desert shall rejoice and blossom;  
     like the crocus 2it shall blossom abundantly,  
          and rejoice with joy and singing.  
     The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,  
          the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.  
     They shall see the glory of the LORD,  
          the majesty of our God.

3   Strengthen the weak hands,  
          and make firm the feeble knees.  
4   Say to those who are of a fearful heart,  
          “Be strong, do not fear!  
     Here is your God.  
          He will come with vengeance,  
     with terrible recompense.  
          He will come and save you.”

5   Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
          and the ears of the deaf unstopped;  
6   then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
          and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.  
     For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,  
          and streams in the desert;  
7   the burning sand shall become a pool,  
          and the thirsty ground springs of water;  
     the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,  
          the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

8   A highway shall be there,  
          and it shall be called the Holy Way;  
     the unclean shall not travel on it,  
          but it shall be for God’s people;  
          no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.  
9   No lion shall be there,  
          nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;  
     they shall not be found there,  
          but the redeemed shall walk there.  
10  And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,  
          and come to Zion with singing;  
     everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;  
          they shall obtain joy and gladness,  
          and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

**James 5:7-10**

7Be patient, therefore, beloved, until the coming of the Lord. The farmer waits for the precious crop from the earth, being patient with it until it receives the early and the late rains. 8You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. 9Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors! 10As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord.

**Matthew 11:2-11**

2When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples 3and said to him, “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” 4Jesus answered them, “Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6And blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.”

7As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: “What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 10This is the one about whom it is written,  
     ‘See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
          who will prepare your way before you.’  
11Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

**Sermon: Flowers in the Desert**

Thursday morning this week, before the sun was up, I dragged myself into the kitchen to make some coffee. The heater kicked on right away, since it was about 27 degrees outside. As I stood there counting the scoops of coffee grounds going into the filter, I heard this distant tinkling sound, like someone was gently and slowly playing chimes. I stopped. I walked over to the back door, opened it and listened. No, the music wasn’t coming from outside. It must be somewhere inside.

So, I proceeded to pick up the electric kettle and as I poured the water into the coffee filter, the music got louder again. It was the same sound chimes, bells, and they sounded harmonically-tuned. Kind of pretty. In my pre-caffeinated state, my thoughts began to go crazy.

Were my ears are playing tricks on me before I was able to think clearly? Maybe the squeaky fan down the hall was squeaking in harmony with itself. And the music I heard got me thinking: What if beautiful music – like bells – was also God’s way to announce the Messiah? My heart began to grow lighter as I imagined what if this was what I should expect when the Savior comes. Bells and chimes have been the heralds of the church for centuries, especially during Advent, this season of preparation.

There are times and places when we are more open than others to the joyful mysteries of God with us. As we continue on this journey towards Christmas, we prepare to meet our Savior. Part of this preparedness requires paying attention to God who is already with us. For me, I am best able to pay attention before I go to work, and sometimes even before that first cup of coffee. Maybe something else works for you, to prepare for the sounding joy. Morning prayer? A hot shower? Talking to children about Santa Claus?

Even for us who see Christmas as a religious, not just a secular holiday, we can get worn down by its activities and expectations. This is about much more than the pretty lights and parties. It is about our encounter with the Lord, close up and personal. It is when we celebrate God’s clear desire and power to be with us, flesh and blood, forever.

It takes time to prepare for Jesus. If we don’t take time out for Jesus, then we are missing the chance at supreme joy. Perhaps setting aside a little time to look for the signs of God’s reign would help, for they are already happening. And to see them and celebrate them with a more trusting, childlike perspective.

I’ve heard some people dismiss the need for celebrating our decorating for Christmas, saying things like, “Christmas is really for children.” They are right. But they are also wrong if they forget that we are ALL God’s children and that means Christmas is for us too. After all, Jesus did say that to enter the kingdom of heaven we must become like little children.

Getting back to Thursday morning when I was making coffee… As I began to thrill at the idea that the sound of chimes could be the herald of Christmas, my husband Russell came down the hallway. I said to him, “Do you hear music, or is the squeaky fan just really in tune?” And he said to me, “I think that’s your cell phone alarm.” He was right. It was the 6am alarm, the sound of chimes, harmonically tuned, which had sent my imagination running wild.

But it doesn’t matter. For I had already traveled in my imagination to a place of joy, heralded by the ring tone. I wasn’t delusional. I was just hopeful. I had enjoyed a holy moment of suspended belief, or disbelief, depending on your point of view. I got to be wrapped in mystery, even if just for a few minutes. It reminded me that no matter our present life and reality, we have to be prepared to receive the Messiah and a moment’s notice and it will be our great joy!

Pay attention to your minutes and hours this Advent. They are already pregnant with the presence of God. Be ready to receive Jesus at any moment during this season, and do not fear, for this leads us to the truest joy. Our lives are constantly full of close encounters with our Savior. Have you noticed?

When John the Baptist was in prison, he had his own questions. So he sent his disciples to ask Jesus whether he was truly the one for whom they were waiting. Even though John was the announcer of the Messiah at first, now he had his own doubts. Jesus sent word: the deaf can hear, the lame can walk… Miracles as surprising as flowers in the desert. This was Jesus’ way of saying, “Yes, I’m here. Those are signs.” Hope springs in the desert. Do they not see?

Our preparedness is key to being able to see with joy the truth that the Messiah is already here. If we are not prepared to see, if we become to buried in ourselves and our own plans, we might fail to look with the eyes of a child at the mysteries God offers us every day. Flowers in the desert. Surprising signs of God’s reign. Expect to see it and may your joy increase. Then tell someone. Amen.

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