**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

The Church With the Holy Spirit Window

**Sunday, December 20, 2020 Fourth Sunday of Advent**

**Rev. Amy Pospichal, Pastor Accompanist, Marjorie McKenzie**

**Hymns:**

**RH 171 O Little Town of Bethlehem**

**RH 307 O Jesus, I Have Promised**

**RH 187 All Glory, Laud and Honor**

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

**Lighting the Candle of Love (liturgy by Rev. Karen Ware Jackson)**

Light one candle for love.

Because the world is broken and the wait is long,

 but love never ends.

Love faithfully goes about the work of

 casting out fear

 speaking truth

 healing the deepest wounds

 crossing the divide from this world to the next and back again.

“Here I am,” she whispers,

 “the servant of the Lord.”

So we light one candle, because it only takes one:

 Christ with us.

**Morning Prayer**

Precious Savior, breathlessly we wait for your Coming. We are making ready with the decorated tree and sentimental ornaments. We have already purhcased presents and cards. We are prepared All of the ingredients for a delightful, sumptuous meal have been purchased. Our hearts are filled to overflowing with love for you and for one another. Come into our waiting hearts that we may celebrate the miraculous day of your birth. Welcome, Lord Jesus, for it is in your name, we pray. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

Recognizing our need for true peace,
both with others and within our own selves,
let us confess those ways we have distanced ourselves from God.

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

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

The truth of Advent is this: God is coming to us! We are not alone.
**In Christ, we are accepted. We are set free of the past. We are given to the future.**Hear the water splashing: this is what forgiveness sounds like.
Look at the light shining: this is what hope looks like.
Take one another’s hand: this is what incarnation feels like.
Share a sign of peace: this is what the world is waiting for.

I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,
we are forgiven!

**Thanks be to God!**The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Shepherd of Israel, listen!
You, who lead your people like sheep;
you, who reign over all things from heaven;
you, who make promises to every generation:
Restore us!
Shine your face on us,
so that we can be saved!

Lord God of might,
won’t you listen to your people’s prayer?
We pray with your people
whose tears never seem to quit,
because of chronic illness or chronic injustice.
We pray with your people who are consumed by conflict,
in fear of oppression,
longing for justice.
We pray especially for those
whose needs are closest to us today…
Restore us!
Shine your face on us,
so that we can be saved!

We especially name before you:

Dominique, granddaughter of Dora Maes

For our community and state leaders, that we find social and economic stability during the pandemic

For travelers, particularly those heading for the holidays

For the healing of our nation

Betty Faye Ragan at the loss of her son, Robert

For Ryan’s grandpa, Francis

Ruth Johnson

Our schools, teachers and students, as well as all of their families

Redeemer of the world,
we pray for the church you have gathered.
You call us out of the world’s ways
and plant us deep in the life of Christ.
We celebrate that the gospel has reached far and wide,
through faithful ministry
and despite human unfaithfulness.
We pray for the church in a time of upheaval and change,
when it seems like our life is uprooted
and our institutions are torn down.

Return to us, God of might!
Plant us again in Christ.
Make us your very own,
through your very own son.
Revive us, reclaim us, reform us,
so we may call on your name rightly
and never turn from your ways.
Restore us, God of might!
Shine your face on us,
so that we can be saved!

Let your kingdom come in this world, O God,
and let our hearts welcome the birth of the Holy Child,
who teaches us to pray as we say together:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Im-Manu-El”**

Immanuel is three words. Hebrew for “With” “Us” “God,” it is also the name of Jesus. It is the name we sing when we call for his coming to save us.

We exist between the now and the not-yet. We proclaim that God is with us now, today, because Jesus has already arrived. We proclaim that God is also coming again to judge the quick and the dead. Advent is full of such paradoxes. God is with us in Jesus Christ, yet we wait for His coming.

So, for you, how do you see God already with you?

In this season of Advent, have you seen signs yet of Jesus’ presence with you?

**Prayer for Illumination**

Come, Spirit of the Lord, and speak through us.
Send your Holy Word to be upon our tongues
and your gospel upon our hearts.
Speak to us, speak through us, speak among us,
for we, your servants, are listening.  **Amen.**

**Gospel Luke 1:26-38**

26In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” 29But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. 31And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” 34Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I am a virgin?” 35The angel said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. 36And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37For nothing will be impossible with God.” 38Then Mary said, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.” Then the angel departed from her.

**Romans 16:25-27**

25Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — 27to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

**Sermon: “Feeding the Trolls” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Cookies remind me of love.

So does the smile of a Labrador retriever.

A well-placed hug, just at the right time when needed speaks volumes about God’s love.

When someone lets you get in front of you in the grocery checkout line.

Signs of peace between enemies.

Saying “I’m sorry.”

A friend who listens to your problems without judgement.

A stranger who pushes your car out of a snowdrift.

Sharing a meal with someone who becomes a friend.

Someone who pays it forward for you in the McDonalds’ drive thru.

C.S. Lewis once wrote, “Any patch of sunlight in a wood will show you something about the sun which you could never get from reading books on astronomy. These pure and spontaneous pleasures are ‘patches of Godlight’ in the woods of our experience.”[[1]](#footnote-1) I agree with Mr. Lewis. “Patches of Godlight” are gifts from heaven, illuminating God’s relationship to us. God, who has already chosen to break into this fearful world as our Savior Jesus, taking the initiative to make all things new. What’s behind the big break-in? Love, His desire to change all of our hearts. The Advent wreath sums up the God-light, signifying hope, peace, joy and love. They are just patches of light. Every good turn we do for another. Every moment we feel cared for and loved, can be a sign of God’s love and care for us. As await the Messiah, there are moments when we may fail to see those patches of God light shining at us, and there are many other moments when it may even seem that God is absent. I think this is really because of our vision, not that God is truly absent. God is never absent. We are the ones who sometimes need a vision correction, stretching and straining to see God’s patchwork of light. For our mortal vision can get clouded by the ways of this world.

But that just the reason why Jesus came in the first place. For the healing of this broken and fearful world. To correct our vision of God’s plan to bring holy hope to a world that needs to be wrapped up in love and held until it heals.

I guess you could say that God is like a quilter, who takes all of the scraps and tatters of the world, arranges them into a beautiful pattern and stitches them together for a good purpose. And if God is that quilter, then we are the scraps and makings of a quilt, to bring comfort. We may also be hurt and broken, we believe that there is so much more to this life than the hurts and the tears. For God gives us the strength to blanket and patch up the sadness and pain of someone else, even if we cannot always fix the hurt. God takes the wounded, the meek, and makes them, like Mary, into vessels of grace.

The great quilter seeks us out to patch up the pain of this world, by distributing patches of Godlight across all peoples. Sometimes we overthink how we should perform such acts of lovingkindness. Especially as we try to create programs to dispense love, in the form of mission, evangelism, and care for each other. But the spontaneity of the holiday season and this time of year which often celebrates extravagance in gift giving should also remind us that acts of lovingkindness are often unexpected, could even call us to spontaneously come out of our zone of comfort, for the comfort of another. For that is also God’s way, to break into our lives and save us when it seems like all is lost. Mary too, spontaneously moves from unmarried teenager to saying “Yes” to the surprise that God is with her and she with God.

God’s son Jesus came into this world to blanket us with love. To cover us and heal us with the only thing that can soothe the world’s problems. Love is the reason why He came, the reason why we are directed to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, souls, minds and our neighbors as ourselves. Love is the reason for our salvation. It is not because we did something to deserve it. It is because God has already claimed us as one of God’s own Creations and we are loved beyond measure.

And God loves us in ways that we only wish that others might love us, even those of us who are downright trolls. A few weeks ago, the Presbyterian Outlook published an article by Kerry Connolly. In her article, “Feed the trolls, find a human…,” she describes meeting a man online – let’s call him “George” - who called her several disparaging names and said he hoped that after the election she would “off herself.” He had read her book, called “Good White Racist: Confronting your role in racial injustice,” and it angered him. He read it because his daughter told him he was a racist and should learn about himself. He bought the book for $12 and read it. People who post things like that now have a term: “troll.” The usual approach to “trolls” is “don’t feed the trolls.” But in this case, Rev. Connolly disregarded the usual advice and instead she did. She wanted to volley right back at him, but instead wrote: “Wow! What a fun-filled and loving message! God bless!” She thought her sarcasm would be enough. And then he wrote: “Kinda like your book.” That evening, she kept thinking about George. What a good father, willing to read a book because his daughter thought he should. And that he was willing to read a book about racism, to find out about himself.

She offered to reimburse him the $12 since he didn’t like the book. Then he revealed that he was reading more because he had injured his wrist. Furthermore, he didn’t need a refund because he actually did learn a few things. She said maybe we should grab a beer sometime. He said, “I do like beer…” And so a new friendship started. To me, this is when the Love of Christ becomes a healing power. It takes a lot of determination to – not always change another person’s ways – but to think more about who God wants us to love and why. Love, just as the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ, sticks it out when the brokenness and hurt threaten us, and makes a full determination to bind us together. Love refuses to give up when others do. It is not always the shy and retiring love that avoids confrontation. With some patience, God’s love can disarm hatred, with humor or earnest concern. Love one another as we would want to be loved.

When we do what God wants us to do to others, then our simplest acts of love become patches of Godlight for someone else. There is a reason for all of the lights in this place, the colorful decorations, the nativity scenery. God’s plan is to break into this world with beauty, justice, reconciliation and hope. It is because of God’s love for all the world that God chose to occupy space with us. It is because the world needs Him so that this is not just some nice idea that floats around in our heads. It is salvation made real, something that you can touch, see, taste and hear. Salvation that changes relationships and gives us all REAL hope. It is not just something you find in a book, or even just in Scripture. It is in us, with us, for us and all. Our little acts of kindness become a part of God’s great quilt of comfort and hope, meant to wrap this world with love. So, notice the smallest of things that bring you joy and peace. And realize that every good thing that you see, taste, hear could be God speaking love to you. And be a glimpse of God’s grace to those you meet. It just might change everything. Amen.

**THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**Social Distancing and Personal Protection.** Please respect one another’s space, observing the 6-foot distancing between one another. Please remember to wash your hands on the way out today. If you need a protective face covering, please notify the pastor and she can help you.

**Don’t forget you have worship options this Christmas.**

Blue Christmas Service – A prayer service for healing and wholeness, could be just the thing for you and those you love. Wednesday, December 23 at 5:30PM

Christmas Eve Service of Lessons and Carols – our traditional service with plenty of music and Scripture to tell the story of our Lord’s birth. Thursday, December 24 at 6:00PM.

**Readers needed!** I am looking for 4-5 people who would like to read scriptures on Christmas Eve.

1. In *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)