**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

The Church With the Holy Spirit Window

**Sunday, February 21, 2021 First Sunday in Lent**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 21 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee**

**RH 379 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing**

**Bulletin Insert - We Seek to Follow Christ**

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

**Morning Prayer**

Dear Lord, on this first week of Lent, we pray to you in hope that one day we shall be led out of the wilderness. But we have been planted to bloom and grow right here as we fast from many of the comforts and conveniences we find familiar. This day in our worship, fill us with the assurance and nourishment that only your Holy Spirit can provide. Open us to new experiences that reveal your will for us and for your hungry world. That we may all behold your promises, feeding us for this journey. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

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

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

Let yourself live and believe this good news:
**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God!**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 51:1-17 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

O Lord our rock, our hearts rejoice in you.
Holy One, our strength rises up
with joy in your deliverance!
You know our every action,
and you lift up those who stumble.

We pray that your peace would shatter the weapons of war,
that your justice would humble those who fill themselves to overflowing,
that those who are starving now would find food in abundance.
We pray for lives that feel barren,
for hearts that are bereaved,
for all who are trapped by the power of death.
We pray for these dear ones who are close to our hearts…

You, Lord, turn death into life.
You, Lord, turn poverty into wealth
and tear down the unjust wealth that drives others into poverty.
When the world sweeps away those who are poor like dust
and tosses out those in need as if they were garbage,
you lift them up and restore them to honor.

You who established the pillars of the earth,
guard our hearts and guide our feet,
so we might be now and ever faithful
to your world-transforming covenant faithfulness.
We pray in Jesus’ name,
who prays with us as we seek your kingdom…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “The Fast”**

There are choices being made in churches around the country.

With the continued pandemic, many churches have been unable to meet in person. My parents’ church, for instance, in Blacksburg Virginia, home of the Virginia Tech Hokies (my alma mater), they have not met in person as a church since last spring. It’s an international town, with a major state university and a vibrant community surrounding it.

There are many like their church. And meeting for the service of the Lord’s Supper has had to change drastically for them.

We think we have it hard. We have, since meeting again together as of last May, been celebrating this sacrament of Holy Communion. But it has been different from the way it used to be. At least we are able to do it together.

Churches are experimenting with this holy sacrament. Some are doing it virtually. Similar to the way we did it last spring on YouTube, the minister leads all of the viewers on the internet to break their own bread during the worship service, and to prepare their own cup of wine or juice, and along with the minister, we all eat and drink of the elements together.

Some are doing it with a few people in the church, streaming it live, but people watching at home might not do it for themselves.

There are some churches who have chosen to not celebrate communion at all. If they haven’t been able to meet in person, then they have chosen to practice something we’re calling “eucharistic fasting.” Eucharist is the Greek term for the sacrament of Holy Communion/Lord’s Supper. Literally it means “thanksgiving.” Some churches have decided that they are in a wilderness moment, and just as Jesus was exiled to the wilderness after his baptism, where he prayed and fasted, these churches and individuals have chosen to fast from the sacrament until they can meet again.

This brings a few things together for us as we think about the meaning of fasting in the wilderness. We are still in a pandemic situation, a type of wilderness. We have each other and when we do have communion, even if a tiny cracker with a small, prepackaged cup of juice, we can remember those who are truly lost in that wilderness. Whether the wilderness of isolation, fear, illness or grief. Maybe not having the beautiful breads and lovingly poured cups of juice is a wilderness to you. The visual and sensual feast that is communion is harder to envision with these prepackaged items. But this is what the Catholics call “viaticum” or “bread for the journey.” Let us look forward to it with prayer as a sign of the good things that will come to us when this wilderness journey finally ends.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Joel 2:1-2, 12-17**

1   Blow the trumpet in Zion;
          sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
     Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
          for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near —
2   a day of darkness and gloom,
          a day of clouds and thick darkness!
     Like blackness spread upon the mountains
          a great and powerful army comes;
     their like has never been from of old,
          nor will be again after them
          in ages to come.

12  Yet even now, says the LORD,
          return to me with all your heart,
     with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
13       rend your hearts and not your clothing.
     Return to the LORD, your God,
          for he is gracious and merciful,
     slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love,
          and relents from punishing.
14  Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,
          and leave a blessing behind him,
     a grain offering and a drink offering
          for the LORD, your God?

15  Blow the trumpet in Zion;
          sanctify a fast;
     call a solemn assembly;
16       gather the people.
     Sanctify the congregation;
          assemble the aged;
     gather the children,
          even infants at the breast.
     Let the bridegroom leave his room,
          and the bride her canopy.

17  Between the vestibule and the altar
          let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep.
     Let them say, “Spare your people, O LORD,
          and do not make your heritage a mockery,
          a byword among the nations.
     Why should it be said among the peoples,
          ‘Where is their God?’”

**Matthew 4:1-4**

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+4%3A1-4&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23211a)] by the devil. **2**After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. **3**The tempter came to him and said, “If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.”

**4**Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.’”

**2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10**

5:20bWe entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6:1As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. 2For he says,
     “At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
          and on a day of salvation I have helped you.”
See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! 3We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, 7truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see — we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; 10as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

**Sermon: “It’s Already Lent” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

It’s already Lent.

Lent is the time we remember the stories of Jesus, freshly baptized, and driven into the desert to fast from food and be tempted by the Devil.

Lent is a time of repentance, of placing all that we have into God’s hands, after a year of trying to take things into our own. Lent is a time when we do without the things that stand between us and our Creator, so that He can recreate us from within.

Lent is also a time when we – through things like fasting – become more in touch with the bodies that we are and that our Lord created us and first called us Good.

It is, to use the more modern term, a chance to push the “re-set” button. Or like with a computer that gets hung up during a program, a hard reboot, Control-Alt-Delete.

But it has seemed like Lent ever since last year’s season of Lent. We have done without. We have had virtual communion. We have had a loss of fellowship, no exercise groups meeting, no fellowship meals, no game nights, no movie nights. Nothing happens here outside of worship. Those who have loved ones nearby, or who have pets to entertain us, might not feel the loss so much. Those who have someone able to take them to the doctor, might find it hard to imagine what it is like for those who have no one. Those who are in pretty good physical health and are able to walk in the park, have little idea what it is like for those who are not that well and depend on the church as their lifeline. For those who have the least amount of help, who are most alone in this world, they struggle with the invisibility of the church, and they are fasting from the usual comforts and security we once offered. In this year-long season of Lent, people experience that “dark night of the soul,” to borrow the words of Mother Teresa.

Maybe this looks like proof that God is not as gracious as our hearts believe. As hard as it is to believe, I prefer to see all of our losses and griefs of the past year as a chance for renewal. A chance to review what a church should be about – and it is not all about money. It is also a chance for us to say to ourselves and to the world: “The church has left the building!”

We have made mistakes along the way as we navigate this wilderness and time of fasting from the comforts of church. For we are all sinners in need of redemption. We do not deserve the gift of forgiveness, and will mess up again and again, but God’s love for us has made it possible for us to receive that undeserved of forgiveness. That great mystery of grace makes us examples of God’s love, especially if we show it to those who need it most.

Lent is a time of fasting, a time to remember how it feels to be in exile, stripped of everything that gives us comfort, only to discover that our Lord and Savior is our only comfort, in life and in death.

Lent is a time of dying, so that we can rise, new and fresh. An acknowledgement of all of our sins and errors, our violations of God’s commandments, those we have done and those we have left undone. Those we know we have committed and those we unknowingly committed.

There is an interesting series through the USA Network called “The Sinner,” which is now in its third season on Netflix. It is not for children. Each season focuses on a main character who has committed a heinous crime. Throughout the season we learn more about the twists and turns of each individual, including their childhood – a warped family life when the child doesn’t exactly understand wrong from right – and the circumstances around the crime. It reveals to us the brokenness of humankind and how hard it can be to rise above our mistakes. The first season is about a young mother named Cora, who has been sent to jail until she faces trial. A fellow inmate encourages her to pray regularly, and Cora says, “I’ve prayed all of my life but where is God now?” Then the inmate tells her a story of how she ended up in jail. She used to steal so that she could get her next drug fix. And then, “I hit rock bottom and lost everything. That is when I realized that all I had to do is surrender to Him.”

Surrender to God. It is both easy and hard. It is scary but freeing. God is inviting us to surrender our lives and hand over to Him all of our failings and griefs. This is the time to do it, in Lent. As we fast in the wilderness, stripped of everything that gives us comfort, we can discover that God is our only comfort, in life and in death. For God has already been to the wilderness too, and we will find Him there. He knows our very hearts and what we need.

Lent is a time of dying, so that we can rise, new and fresh. An acknowledgement of all of our sins and errors, our violations of God’s commandments, those we have done and those we have left undone. Those we know we have committed and those we unknowingly committed. Remembering that great prayer of surrender called the “Serenity Prayer,” prayed by alcoholics around the world: “God grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change. The courage to change the things I can. And the wisdom to know the difference.”

We would do well to recognize that for half the world, it’s been Lent since last year. For those who have who have been passed over by the crowds, who are alone in their homes, those who have no one, it has continued to be a wilderness. The only way for us to move forward in this life of faith is to remember our own failings, surrender all to our Savior. It’s not dignified, it is not easy and it certainly can be frightening. But remember that when we have nothing else, we still have God, who is our only comfort in life and in death. Look for Him in your wilderness. Jesus has already been there. And when you surrender to Him, He will be your comfort. 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.

**The Annual Meeting** will not be today, as of yet, until our Elders can make sure that our 2020 Report to the Congregation is correct and accurate. Please forgive us for the delays this year.