**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, July 19, 2020 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**RH 41 When Morning Gilds the Skies**

**RH 105 How Gentle God’s Commands**

**RH 78 God Be With You Till We Meet Again**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord, you gather us into your dwelling  
and lift us up into your holy presence.  
Make us worthy of you  
and teach us always to do what is right.

May our words and thoughts be found worthy in your sight,

Our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

Our God knows us inside out and promises to always be with us. Confident in this promise, let us confess our sin to God and before one another. Let us pray.

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

**Assurance of Pardon**

Surely, God is here, reconciling us through the gift of grace.  
**Surely, Christ is here, bringing the Good News of our salvation.**  
Surely, the Spirit is here, leading us to share this gift with others.  
**Thanks be to God, God is always with us.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 139:1-12, 23-24 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Holy One, in your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Spark of Life,  
creation was envisioned by you and is sustained by you;  
in gratitude we pray for the world:  
that its riches and resources be used responsibly and fairly;  
that its rulers and leaders may govern with justice, compassion and humility;  
that humankind may live with understanding and respect,  
noticing what unites us;  
In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Prophet of Love,  
you lived among us to teach us – to show us – how to love;  
in humility we pray for siblings around the globe:  
for those dehumanized by their struggle for existence, may we listen;  
for those overshadowed by the constancy of death, may we notice;  
for those besieged by fear, anger and relentless peril, may we show up;  
for those ensnared by systems beyond their control, may we demand change.  
In your love and mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Breath of Being,  
you are here – in this very moment – as constant presence and insistent voice;  
in gratitude we pray…with boldness we pray:  
inundate the world with humanity,  
overwhelm the world with truth,  
flood the world with kindness,  
upset our indifference,  
accelerate our action,  
fortify our resolve,  
compel us to authentic discipleship  
that nurtures creation, embodies love and breathes life.  
In your love and mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray in the one who bring us joy,  
Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray:

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “The Kingdom of Heaven”**

The Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to someone who showed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and then went away. So, when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well.

What happens next?

This is a parable of Jesus, which we will hear in a few minutes. This parable continues on, telling us that the workers in the field complain that weeds are growing up in the wheat. But the farmer tells them to leave them alone and allow them to continue to grow up amongst the wheat, until harvest.

This is another parable of Jesus, which comes with an explanation of it. He only explains it to his disciples, however, and here is basically what he says:

“The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, 39and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers…”

Remember last week’s parable of the sower? Here is another one about seeds and sowing, and Jesus, the Son of Man, is the one doing the planting. He explains to them that the sower allows the weeds of evil to grow up alongside the children of the kingdom. And this is allowed to happen. This is a parable to describe the kingdom of heaven. This kingdom living involves living alongside evil, for the time being. Maybe it charges the children of the kingdom to be patient and not afraid for God has reasons for this to happen and there will be a day of reckoning.

What is also true about the growing conditions is, some people theorize that the wheat and the weeds look remarkably similar at first, so that when they are small, even though that’s the prime time to pull weeds, they are indistinguishable. Even though the sower knows who is who, we have a much harder time knowing which is which.

So, what does this say to you about the kingdom of heaven?

**Prayer for Illumination**

Lord Christ, you teach in parables, telling stories in ways that draw us in and reveal God’s will. As we crowd around you this day, eager to hear your word to us, we ask for the ears to hear and not only hear, but understand and not only understand, but act on that which you long for us to know in the depths of our being. Amen.

**Gospel Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43**

24He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; 25but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. 26So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. 27And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ 28He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ 29But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. 30Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

36Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” 37He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; 38the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, 39and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. 40Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. 41The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, 42and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. 43Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”

**Romans 8:12-25**

12So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh — 13for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. 15For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” 16it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, 17and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ — if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

18I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. 19For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; 20for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; 23and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. 24For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? 25But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**Genesis 28:10-19a**

10Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. 11He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. 12And he dreamed that there was a ladder set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven; and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. 13 And the LORD stood beside him and said, “I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; 14and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. 15Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.” 16Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place — and I did not know it!” 17And he was afraid, and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

18So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. 19aHe called that place Bethel;

**Sermon: “Thin Places” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Jacob found himself in a thin place.

A “thin place” is a Celtic term referring to areas that seem to allow God to shine through, as if there is just a thin veil between heaven and earth.

Jacob lay down in this place – a “certain place,” and he went to sleep. Then he was visited by angels and the Lord, God of Jacob’s ancestors. The promise that comes to him is the promise of land, room to multiply offspring and – the last promise – God is with Jacob, God will keep him, and will never leave Jacob until God fulfills His promise. Jacob wakes up, and fearfully realizes that he is at the gate to heaven, God’s house.

This reading begins with calling it “a certain place.” But by the end of the story, it receives a name. “Beth-el,” meaning, “House of God.” He marked with a stone and anointed it with oil. He used the stone he slept on the night before, standing it up on end. The actual stone on which his head rested when he had this dream, became a memorial, a shrine in a way.

I think about the times when I have gone hiking. Out here, where rocks are plentiful, it is not unusual for hikers or the park rangers to set up a “cairn” along the hiking trail. Especially in areas where the trail is hard to see, or it weaves back and forth across streams, one is apt to see on a well-tended hike, stacks of rocks piled up 4-5 stones high. Usually they stand just about 5 inches tall, just enough to be seen. Cairns are not markers of holy ground, like Jacob’s stone, but they connect the dots for a hiker’s journey through God’s world, a space that someone thought was sacred enough to show to others. They set up pillars, to mark where one may go.

Maybe this was like Jacob’s pillar of stone. He had to mark this spot. Others might see it and understand that this is a place where heaven and earth intersect. It is holy ground, a “thin place” where the heaven and earth met. If Jacob traveled by this place again, he would see the stone he used for a pillow, and remember the promises that here that the Lord made to him on that very spot. An altar, if you will.

I thank God that we are able, at least for now, to continue worshiping in this sanctuary. For God’s graceful presence is not tied just to certain places. Not after the promise He made to Jacob “I will never leave you… I will keep you wherever you go…” This means that God promised to always be with Jacob. So, Jacob marked that specific place as a place of revelation, but part of the promise is that no matter where he is going, the God of his ancestors. This same promise is echoed in the responsive reading. God has promised to be everywhere, and go with us wherever we are. But having a “certain place” to go, where we are able to recall God’s promises to us, where we feel the embrace of this sacred family formed for us by Jesus Christ Himself, is a blessing to us indeed.

Since 1906, this church – different sanctuary – has stood as a marker for where you can connect with God. Some of you remember the first sanctuary. The ceiling was that pressed tin, with the impressions of angels. I have known of some of you, who happen to have keys to the church, to just come in on your lunch breaks, or when you’re really needing some serenity, and sit in the silence. I like to do that too. It is a space that is more than a “cairn” for travelers to stop in on their journey to find God. It is our own thin place in Tucumcari. A place to not only worship God with our minds and bodies, but entire beings. And this is so important, bottom line important, that even though our Elders voted to shut down Fellowship Hall next door, we do not want to do away with meeting here again, not unless we absolutely have to.

The Holy Spirit window is a “thin place.” It is full of your own personal revelations that are just between you and God. It is full of the stories of salvation that have happened within these walls. All of your requests for God’s help, all your announcements of answered prayer. Our grief, our tears, and our joys. It is not God, but God uses places and spaces to speak to us through that veil between heaven and earth. We are witnesses and God is our witness, who has been with us and for us since the beginning. Whether you’re here for the “scintillating sermons” (ha ha) or the people, or just to sit under the glow of that Holy Spirit window, at least you’re here – to drink from this well of God’s presence. Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place. Let us remember to thank God for this sacred space. And also remember that wherever we go, though it may be harder for us to notice, God goes with us. 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.

**Monday Sabbath**. Rev. Amy is returning to her original practice of observing the Sabbath on a Monday, instead of Fridays, as Fridays are often busy times at the church.