**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

The Church With the Holy Spirit Window

**Sunday, March 14, 2021 4th Sunday in Lent**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 271 Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me**

**RH 190 Beneath the Cross of Jesus**

**RH 253 How I Love the Law, O Lord**

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

**Morning Prayer**

This 4th Sunday of Lent we rejoice in your God and Savior! Your providence stretches to every corner of the earth and every place in the heavens. Your natural grace is at work in both desert and abundance. Open our eyes today so that we can truly see your hand in all things. Through our savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

In becoming one of us, God became poor so we could receive the riches of mercy.  In coming to us, God took on our death, so we could be made alive together with Christ.  Come, offer your confessions, knowing that by grace you have been saved.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Covenant-making God, you provide for us in many different ways,  
and we confess that we do not always recognize you at work in the world around us.  
We get impatient, wanting you to work on our schedule.  
We wish for something more or different than what you have offered.  
We want someone else to solve problems we have had a hand in creating.  
Forgive our foolish ways, our thoughtless words, our arrogant ignorance.  
Help us to face the monsters within.  
Turn our eyes once again to you, and focus our hearts on your way,  
that we may be faithful to your promise.  
We pray in the name of the One who is lifted up in the desert,  
drawing all people to himself, Jesus the Christ.**  (Silence) Amen.

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

How much does God love us?  Enough to send the divine heart, hope, and spirit to us, not to condemn us, but to save us.  
**Not by our speaking or doing, but by God’s good and precious grace are we saved.  Thanks be to God!  Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22**

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;  
**for his steadfast love endures for ever.**Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,  
those he redeemed from trouble  
**and gathered in from the lands,  
from the east and from the west,  
from the north and from the south.**

Some were sick through their sinful ways,  
and because of their iniquities endured affliction;  
**they loathed any kind of food,  
and they drew near to the gates of death.**Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,  
and he saved them from their distress;  
**he sent out his word and healed them,  
and delivered them from destruction.**Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,  
for his wonderful works to humankind.  
**And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,  
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Prayers of the People**

When once we let sin  
coil itself around our hearts,  
you wrap us in the  
comforting shawl of grace.  
When once  
we obsessed over us,  
you freed us to give  
our selves away to the world.  
Ceaseless Creator,  
your love overwhelms us  
each and every day.

Where once  
we sat by the edge of the way,  
with sin and death on either side,  
now we can pull up a chair  
next to you, to rest our lives on you.  
Where once  
we hungered for love  
and thirsted for compassion,  
now we are filled at your Table.  
Healing Hope,  
your grace flows through us  
each and every day.

When we are tempted  
to submit our resumes  
to the Evil One,  
you put us to work,  
caring for the outsiders.  
When we are tempted  
to mutter our way  
through each moment,  
you teach us songs of grace.  
Faithful Spirit,  
your peace surrounds us  
each and every day.

You are with us each and every day,  
God in Community, Holy in One,  
even as we pray as we have been taught,  
Our Father . . .

**Time out for Teaching: About the Book of Numbers**

The book of Numbers always seemed fascinating to me. It details the stories of the Hebrews, traveling through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. Some of the stories are also in Exodus, but told in a different manner, and at times stories that are NOT in Exodus. Today is one of those days. Today is a story that sounds kind of strange to us. It begins like a typical “complaint” story, which we see over and over again with those Israelites under Moses’ leadership.

But the complaints of the Israelites, motivated by their own impatience in the wilderness, complain about the food, lack of food and lack of water. Funny that it says “there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” That could be a redactional seam there.

It is in response to this moment of impatience that the Lord sends them poisonous serpents that bit people and lead many to die. So, the writer says God basically responds to their complaints by sending them even more trouble, including death. This is of course, the perspective of some people, who think that God wishes us death. As if God would want to kill us for our disobedience.

And if God does, then God has thrown a lifeline to those Israelites who have seen a way to healing. God gives them a way to save themselves, which is to look at a sculpture bearing the image of one of these biting serpents. They had to face the image of the very thing that was killing them.

Now, this may sound odd, coming from an ancient people who did not believe in making “graven images” or “idols.” You may see that in some ancient Hebrew art, God is not artistically represented.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Numbers 21:4-9**

4From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” 6Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. 8And the LORD said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” 9So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

**John 3:14-21**

14“And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

16“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

17“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. 20For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

**Sermon: “The Monsters Within” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

This morning’s prayer of confession talks about our difficulty in being able to face the “monsters within” us. It was inspired by today’s readings about the poisonous serpents. The monsters in our reading from Numbers are snake-like beings that were killing the Israelites. As usual, the Israelites saw the arrival of these serpents as God’s judgment on them for their lack of faith and complaints in the wilderness. Begging Moses for help, God gives him these instructions – to fashion a serpent of bronze, place it on a staff, and then anyone who looks upon it shall be healed and protected from this suffering.

Jesus takes this image and uses it in a new way in the Gospel according to John. He speaks of lifting up the Son of Man so that we may all behold Him and find eternal life. There is an intersection here. Between the healing serpent on a pole and the Savior of the World being lifted up. And, if we lift up the Son of Man, then there is nothing else higher to see. And to look to Jesus, our Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, this can only be a good thing – literally the best thing - to seek God’s forgiveness. Only, Jesus is not the monster within us. The serpent on a pole represented both the sin and the forgiveness, and that is a monster worth looking at, one that led the Israelites to a reminder of God’s power to help and save.

Jesus has always been referred to as “The Great Physician.” You might remember what he said in the gospel according to Mark: “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” He said this as he was criticized for eating with prostitutes and tax collectors. And how do you get better from whatever ails you? You see a doctor. Those who choose not to see a doctor have less of a chance of being healed. If you do not see your doctor, then you won’t get healed. Jesus is our great physician, who came to heal us of our sins. In order to see our doctor, we have to really be willing to look at Him in all honesty, and truly be willing to work with Him, following His prescriptions.

His prescription for us all is to look to him, and in order to receive that healing, he is also going to require we look at the monsters within us. Lifting up Jesus to talk to Him, to praise Him, to call Him Lord automatically calls for us to place ourselves at His feet, in adoration of the only one who has been able to beat death by being lifted up on a cross to die. Lifting up Jesus automatically calls for us to hand all of our fears and hopes, all of our brokenness and sin – hand it all to him, freely, entrusting all that we have and need to His healing hands.

We have to lift Him up. Lift up the Son of Man who takes away the sins of the world. Make sure that He is our top priority, the one on whom we must rest our hopes. There are many things that compete for our attention. Many things which are important, but not as important as He. There are many important things in this world, many which add to God’s kingdom and further God’s mission, but if we lose sight of God, Jesus Himself, then there really isn’t much reason to continue on God’s mission, for it can easily turn into just our own mission.

The ministry and mission of any church can be compromised if we forget why we are all here. We are here for God first and everything else second.

So it helps to face the monsters within us, and ask God’s help to shove those monsters out of the way of being closer to our Savior. Our prayer of confession asks for God’s help to “face the monsters within. And to turn our eyes once again to God.” For the only way to turn to God is to also face down our own monsters, our own stinging serpents. Coming back to our Prayer of Confession, it remembers this: “We wish for something more or different than what you have offered.

We want someone else to solve problems we have had a hand in creating.” And some of the problems we are left to solve are problems created by someone else, some of our problems are truly problems we have been involved in creating.

The ancient Israelites believed that some of the evils that befell them were because of their own doing. Judgment from God. We don’t know for a fact whether they were wrong. But when bad things happen to us, maybe it can give us an opportunity to ask how we can live a better life, whether our problems are our own making or a result of someone else’s mistakes. On this pilgrimage of faith, we will surely have a few U-turns along the way, and worry whether our problems are God’s judgment. As they come along, we must always remember to lift up the Son of Man, who calls for us to look to our monsters within, as an opportunity to take corrective action. For healing of our souls. The only way to heal our souls is to face the monsters within.

You might remember this photograph which I shared with those who attended church in Fellowship Hall several months ago. It is a photo of a sculpture, about 2 stories high, and it looks like a crucifix – a cross with Jesus crucified on it. But when you look at it more closely, you will see that it also appears a serpent, wound up to the top of the staff, its head down like Jesus’ own head. I took it from the top of Mt. Nebo, in Jordan, overlooking the Jordan River Valley. The bronze statue stands at the approximate place where Moses and the Israelites stood, as they surveyed the next leg of their journey, looking across at the Promised Land where they were about to cross over. It reflects both our Old and New Testament readings today. It also looks like the old symbol used often in medicine – the rod of Aeclepius. A single rod with a serpent entwined around it from bottom to top. There is a similar one of Greek and Roman culture called a Caduceus, topped with a pair of wings referring to Hermes, also known as Mercury. The World Health Organization uses the single serpent on a rod as their symbol. Others choose the Caduceus.

Whichever you choose, they are ancient symbols of healing. When you go to your doctor next time, look for those symbols. And be reminded also of Jesus’ power to heal our souls. Amen.

**Service of Ordination and Installation of Elders and Deacons**

As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

**There is one body and one Spirit, just as we were called to the one hope of our calling.**

In baptism, Robin, Marge, Kenna, Yvette and David were clothed with Christ, and are now called by God through the voice of the church to enter into ministries of service and governance, announcing in word and deed the good news of Jesus Christ.

**We remember with joy our common calling to serve Christ, and we celebrate God’s particular call to our brothers and sisters.**

There are varieties of gifts, but it is the same Spirit who gives them.

**There are different ways of serving God, but it is the same Lord who is served.**

God works through each person in a unique way, but it is God’s purpose that is accomplished.

**To each is given a gift of the Spirit to be used for the common good.**

Together we are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.

We are all called into the church of Jesus Christ by baptism, and marked as Christ’s own by the Holy Spirit. This is our common calling, to be disciples and servants of our servant Lord. Within the community of the church, some are called to particular service as deacons, as elders, and as ministers of the Word and Sacrament. Ordination is Christ’s gift to the church, assuring that his ministry continues among us, providing for ministries of caring and compassion in the world, ordering the governance of the church, and preaching the Word and administering the sacraments.

Representing the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church, the session of First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari now installs Robin Cherry and Marjorie Gene McKenzie to the office of elder and reinstalls Kenna McKenzie-Young and ordains and installs Yvette McFarland and David Huffman the office of deacon, and installs them to active service on their respective boards.

**REAFFIRMATION OF THE BAPTISMAL COVENANT**

Ordination calls the whole church to renewed commitment, and reminds us all to bear gladly the yoke of Christ given in the covenant of baptism. Let us, therefore, reaffirm our baptismal vows, renouncing all that opposes God and God’s rule and affirming the faith of the holy catholic church.

**RENUNCIATIONS**

Trusting in the gracious mercy of God, do you turn from the ways of sin and renounce evil and its power in the world? I do.

Do you turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as your Lord and Savior, trusting in his grace and love? I do.

Will you be Christ’s faithful disciple, obeying his Word and showing his love? I will, with God’s help.

**PROFESSION**

With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

***Do you believe in God the Father?***

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

***Do you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God?***

I believe in Jesus Christ, God’s only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

***Do you believe in God the Holy Spirit?***

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

**Thanksgiving for Baptism**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

Eternal and gracious God, we give you thanks. In countless ways you have revealed yourself in ages past, and have blessed us with signs of your grace. We praise you that through the waters of the sea you led your people Israel out of bondage, into freedom in the land of your promise. We praise you for sending Jesus your Son, who for us was baptized in the waters of the Jordan, and was anointed as the Christ by your Holy Spirit. Through his death and resurrection you set us free from the bondage of sin and death, and give us cleansing and rebirth. We praise you that in baptism you give us your Holy Spirit, who teaches us and leads us into all truth, filling us with a variety of gifts, that we might proclaim the gospel to all nations and serve you as a royal priesthood. We rejoice that you claimed us, and that by your grace we are born anew. By your Holy Spirit renew us, that we may be empowered to do your will and continue forever in the risen life of Christ, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be all glory and honor, now and forever. Amen.

Remember your baptism and be thankful.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Ordination Questions for Deacons and Elders**

Do you trust in Jesus Christ your Savior, acknowledge him Lord of all and Head of the Church, and through him believe in one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? *I do.*

Do you accept the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be, by the Holy Spirit, the unique and authoritative witness to Jesus Christ in the Church universal, and God’s Word to you? *I do.*

Do you sincerely receive and adopt the essential tenets of the Reformed faith as expressed in the confessions of our church as authentic and reliable expositions of what Scripture leads us to believe and do, and will you be instructed and led by those confessions as you lead the people of God? *I do and I will.*

Will you fulfill your office in obedience to Jesus Christ, under the authority of Scripture, and be continually guided by our confessions? *I will.*

Will you be governed by our church’s polity, and will you abide by its discipline? Will you be a friend among your colleagues in ministry, working with them, subject to the ordering of God’s Word and Spirit? *I will.*

Will you in your own life seek to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, love your neighbors, and work for the reconciliation of the world? *I will.*

Do you promise to further the peace, unity, and purity of the church? *I do.*

Will you seek to serve the people with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love? *I will.*

**To deacons:** Will you be a faithful deacon, teaching charity, urging concern, and directing the people’s help to the friendless and those in need? In your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ? *I will.*

**To elders:** Will you be a faithful elder, watching over the people, providing for their worship, nurture, and service? Will you share in government and discipline, serving in governing bodies of the church, and in your ministry will you try to show the love and justice of Jesus Christ? *I will.*

Do we, the members of the church, accept N. and N. as deacons and elders, chosen by God through the voice of this congregation to lead us in the way of Jesus Christ? ***We do.***

Do we agree to encourage them, to respect their decisions, and to follow as they guide us, serving Jesus Christ who alone is Head of the Church? ***We do.***

**Prayer of Ordination**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

***Those gathered around the candidates lay hands on them.***

Gracious and eternal God, with joy we give you all thanks and praise. Throughout the ages you have been faithful to your covenant people whom you have called out of bondage and redeemed to be your own.

As you have with the saints of old, pour out your Holy Spirit upon your servants whom you called through baptism and marked as your own. Grant them the same mind that was in Christ Jesus. Give them a spirit of truthfulness that they may show the compassion of Christ in the actions of daily living and rightly govern your people. Give them the gifts of your Holy Spirit to build up the church, to strengthen the common life of your people, and to lead with compassion and vision. In the walk of faith and for the work of ministry, give to your servants gladness and strength, discipline and hope, humility, humor, and courage, and an abiding sense of your presence.

Pour out your Spirit of power and truth upon your church that we may be for you a holy people, baptized to serve you in the world. Sustain this church in ministry. Ground us in the gospel, secure our hope in Christ, strengthen our service, as you increase our love for one another. Show us the power of your grace in our life together, that we may be a compelling witness to the good news of Christ Jesus our Lord. 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.