**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, March 24, 2019, 3rd Sunday in Lent**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

We praise you, Mighty Lord

For your Creation-

For your cosmos

And for your people.

Your abundant life

Astonishes us with every new discovery.

Ground us again today

In the certainty of your forgiveness and correction.

Lead us to freedom

To follow you with joy! Amen.

**Call to Confession**

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

**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.**

**Psalm 63:1-8 (please see bulletin)**

**Time Out for Teaching: Satisfied Souls**

Mother Teresa of Calcutta surprised the world when after her death a book was published about her life. It described times when she had to endure the “dark night of the soul.” Some people were fascinated that such a great missionary for Christ, a person who we all admired for her courageous works of mercy – someone we often had typecast as some perfectly faithful Christian – and then we find out that she was still only human. She had her own dark nights of the soul.

I’m relieved, frankly. I think knowing that Mother Teresa had such nights makes me feel a little better about myself. It has been said that we were born with a God-shaped hole in our hearts, an emptiness which can only be satisfied by our search for God. We hunger and thirst for this when it’s hard to locate God’s presence.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Isaiah 55:1-9**

1Ho, everyone who thirsts,

come to the waters;

and you that have no money,

come, buy and eat!

Come, buy wine and milk

without money and without price.

2Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,

and your labor for that which does not satisfy?

Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,

and delight yourselves in rich food.

3Incline your ear, and come to me;

listen, so that you may live.

I will make with you an everlasting covenant,

my steadfast, sure love for David.

4See, I made him a witness to the peoples,

a leader and commander for the peoples.

5See, you shall call nations that you do not know,

and nations that do not know you shall run to you

because of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel,

for he has glorified you.

6Seek the LORD while he may be found,

call upon him while he is near;

7let the wicked forsake their way,

and the unrighteous their thoughts;

let them return to the LORD, that he may have mercy on them,

and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.

8For my thoughts are not your thoughts,

nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD.

9For as the heavens are higher than the earth,

so are my ways higher than your ways

and my thoughts than your thoughts.

**Luke 13:1-9**

1At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them — do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

6Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. 9If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"

**Sermon: Give it Time**

None of us is ever as bad as the worst thing we’ve ever done.

That’s good news.

But how hard it is to believe this, especially as we are commanded to try and be better people, and sometimes it seems like the world is keeping us back.

Jesus tells us a story today in response to questioning about those Galileans who seem to have suffered more than others. Many Jews believed that if you had bad things happen to you it was some sign from Heaven that you have been particularly sinful. Earlier generations of Jews believed this as well, after their many years of foreign invasion and exile to foreign lands. People believed that God brought judgment upon them with bad stuff.

When we believe that bad things happen to us because we ourselves have been “bad,” there can be a problem. We can get stuck, give up on trying to be better, for what’s the big point, if we will never be perfect enough to avoid God’s judgment! We will never be perfect so that we can avert any kind of bad stuff. The other problem with this is if we think that our actions bring about bad things to happen to us, then we are making a mistake in thinking that we live in a mechanical universe, where our actions bring about a direct reaction. Like a vending machine in heaven, when we drop in our quarters, we get something out of it, as if God works like that bringing us accidents and disease or other bad stuff as a direct result of our behaviors. We can forget that God’s grace is in operation, God’s mercy and love. And sometimes we make mistakes but we don’t automatically get penalized for it. Don’t get me wrong. We should take responsibility for our own actions. But sometimes we have to step back a moment to see what else could be a part of this equation. What else could be happening when bad stuff happens to us, even when trying to be good people? Perhaps there is something much larger happening than what we see. Perhaps there are lessons to be learned.

We are presented with a choice: believe that we are bad people or believe that we are people just trying to be good in the face of hard stuff happening around us?

Rabbi Harold Kushner is the author of When Bad Things Happen to Good People. A conservative Jewish man who was a Rabbi to his own congregation, he went through a father’s worst nightmare. His little boy, named Aaron, died in a car accident. The seeming randomness of his child’s death threw Rabbi Kushner. He wondered what he could have done to have lost his child, and what could his child possibly have done to have died so young. He was lost, bereaved, and confused about how God could allow this. Rabbi Kushner wondered if God was judging him by allowing this huge loss.

It’s a crisis that usually makes us feel that way and causes us to question. Just like those who asked Jesus about the Galileans. His answer? "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans?  No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did.” That’s the way Jesus puts it. They’re not any worse than any of us. What Jesus says here is – repentance is necessary, no matter what. But he has something else to say, when he begins to expand on this repentance, sinfulness and anxiety. His speech on the fig tree, which seems to be producing nothing and is a “waste of the soil it grows on” essentially tells us all to give things time. Give it another year. Give it time. For what we might judge as a tree with no production, a waste of space, perhaps it just needs more time. For the matters that frustrate or frighten us, for the things which we don’t have a clear answer or solution, give it a little time.

Song by Laura Story called “Blessings”

“What if your blessings come through raindrops,

What if your healing comes through tears,

What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know You’re near.

What if trials of this life…are your mercies in disguise.”

Carol Fujii, one of our Presbyterian world missionaries stationed in Thailand, wrote recently of how hard it can be – trying to be God’s good disciple, and how sometimes we feel discouraged and alone. As a missionary, it can be rather lonely out there and our discouragement can come out in grumbling and resentment. It can be hard in those moments, she writes, to realize that even in those harder times, God’s mercy is there in disguise. Give it time, says she, and God’s mercy finally becomes more palpable. It is only in retrospect that we learn these things, as Carol writes, “Sometimes, blessings do come through storms, whether physical or emotional pain or loss. Though they are painful, I thank God for the lessons about His love and my worth.” Give it all time, friends. Time for God to unravel our problems with us, and for us to begin to see the blessings through the storms. What we have to do is repent of our past, and look out for when God’s blessings begin to emerge. Give it time, give yourself time and give God time to help you. Amen.

**Announcements**

Lenten study of the Resurrection stories of Jesus will be on Wednesday evenings from 6-7pm in the Fellowship Hall. Rev. Amy will be out of town this week but we will resume our study next Wednesday on April 3rd.

This Wednesday, the Dutch Treat Dames are scheduled to meet for lunch at the Cornerstone at noon!