**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, March 31, 2019, 4th Sunday in Lent**

**Call to Worship**

From near and far, long-serving and first-timers, we enter this house together:

**We want to see Jesus!**  
Share the good news, all are welcome in this place.  
**We come, drawn by grace and challenge, ready to follow in faith.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord, draw near to us today in our worship,

That we can hear your word of mercy

That our thoughts and singing be our prayers

That our worship be in your Holy Spirit

And that we may be refreshed.

Wash over us with your power and grace

That we may feel your nearness and bear it forth into your world in need of grace.

We thank you and praise your Mighty name,

Almighty God. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession**

**Lord of the Way, you said that where you are, your servants will be. We confess that we would prefer you to come with us, rather than for us to go with you. Too often you are found in places we would rather avoid, with people we are afraid of, doing things we wish you wouldn’t. Forgive our inward vision, and call us to your side once again. Give us courage to follow where you lead, to bring others along on the journey, and to live as people filled with your grace, your hope, your truth, your life. We pray in the name of the One who was obedient even to the cross, and beyond to the empty tomb, Jesus the Christ. (silence)** Amen.

**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 32**

Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,

whose sin is covered.

**Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity,**

**and in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

While I kept silence, my body wasted away

through my groaning all day long.

**For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;**

**my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.**

Then I acknowledged my sin to you,

and I did not hide my iniquity;

**I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"**

**and you forgave the guilt of my sin.**

Therefore let all who are faithful

offer prayer to you;

at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters

shall not reach them.

**You are a hiding place for me;**

**you preserve me from trouble;**

**you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.**

I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;

I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

**Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,**

**whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,**

**else it will not stay near you.**

Many are the torments of the wicked,

but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

**Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous,**

**and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.**

**Prayers of the People (you are invited to silent prayer after I say, Healing God, help us care for one another.)**

Gracious and Steadfast God,  
we pray this day for those who are sick and in need of your care, Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

for those who are hospitalized, Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

for those undergoing treatment for cancer and other illnesses, Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)  
  
for those who cry out to you for health and healing. Healing God, help us care for one another.  
(silence)

For those who are struck with natural disasters. Healing God, help us care for one another.  
(silence)

For those who are struggling under dangerous political regimes. Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

For those who live in fear of those who should love them. Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

For those who live in loneliness, Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

For all those others who we still need to lift up to you O God. Healing God, help us care for one another. (silence)

Author of our Lives,  
hear us now as we pray as you taught us to pray, saying: **Our Father…**

**Time Out for Teaching: Lost and Found**

This morning’s reading circles around being lost and found. About repentance and returning to God’s loving and merciful arms. You are about to hear a reading from Luke, but check it out in the bulletin and you’ll see it jumps from verse 3 to verse 11b. It skips over 2 other parables Jesus uses to teach those Pharisees about God’s mercy.

So, if you would please pull out your pew Bibles and look at it with me for a second. Luke 15.

Verses 1-3 have a controversy. “All” the tax collectors and sinners “were coming near to him” to hear him. And this angers the Pharisees. Do you know why?

Then Jesus tells them the parable of the lost sheep. If even just one of the sheep gets lost, the Shepherd goes out to look for that one.

Then he tells them the parable of the woman’s lost coin. It’s part of a woman’s dowry and if she loses just one of her coins, she will clean the house and turn it upside down till she finds it.

Jesus says there will be a party in heaven if just one sinner is lost and found.

It’s only after these two very short stories that we hear about the Prodigal Son. But what each of these stories tell the Pharisees is God is actively searching for all who are lost. God is that woman who has lost a precious possession – and we are those precious possessions of God. God is that Good Shepherd who will not rest until he has found that wayward sheep.

What is really cool about all of these stories, is they end with a celebration! God celebrates! So, with every person who was lost and found, God is very, very pleased. This probably unnerved those Pharisees to hear that, but then, they needed to hear it too.

**Prayer for Illumination**

God, we are about to hear your word read and proclaimed

Remove the blocks that keep us from hearing your message

And enable our minds to new knowledge and understanding.

Ground our hearts in what you desire for us

And train us to serve where you need us most.

In your Son our Savior, Amen.

**2 Corinthians 5:16-21**

16From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we 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.

**Gospel Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32**

1Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

3So he told them this parable:

11b"There was a man who had two sons. 12The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' 20So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe-the best one-and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

25"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"

**Sermon: “When OK is not OK”**

Let’s play – name that song.

*“Why do birds suddenly appear*

*Every time you are near?*

*Just like me, they long to be*

*Close to you*

*Why do stars fall down from the sky*

*Every time you walk by?*

*Just like me, they long to be*

*Close to you.”*

Can you guess yet what it is? Of course you can! It goes back to the 1970s, but just about everyone has probably heard it, the song called “Close to You” by the brother-sister duo, The Carpenters. Of course, it’s a love song. But, after hearing the first 3 verses of our gospel reading today, you could rewrite the song for Jesus. Listen to this:

*“Why do tax collectors suddenly appear, every time you are near?*

*Just like me, they long to be, close to you.”*

*Why do sinners suddenly appear…(*you know the drill)

Jesus had become a magnet for sinners and tax collectors. They had begun to come to him habitually. Not just once or twice but often and as a regular habit. Our ancient Greek uses a particular verb tense (periphrastic) that says these outcasts of society sought him out regularly. Not just to stand at a distance. They wanted to be “close” to Jesus. Why? Because they weren’t welcome anywhere else in the Jewish faith. They were branded “sinners” – because of their professions or because of something they did. No wonder, to find that Jesus would welcome them and speak to them, they longed to be close to Him. He was a sinner magnet. But to allow them to come near to him, was definitely “Not OK.”

At least that’s what the Pharisees believed.

So, the beginning of this reading sets the stage for the parable of the Prodigal Son. Jesus turns the tables on the Pharisees and shows them God’s way of welcoming the sinners.

We all have heard the story before. Two sons, and older and a younger. A magnanimous father who loves them both. The younger asks for his inheritance and goes on an adventure, losing everything. He finds himself in a dead-end job feeding pigs. Ironically, he doesn’t even have enough to feed himself. He finally comes around to realize that the only thing left is to offer himself to his father as a servant. Better than slopping pigs. By the way, I recently heard from a wise old man – “If you do something stupid, you will go on an adventure.” This younger son sure did that. And what he did was Not OK.

When he does return home, tail between his legs, genuinely humbled by his life choices, his brother does something even less “OK.” His brother acts a lot like those Pharisees. He seems resentful, unable to see him with genuine mercy. But his father welcomes the younger son with open arms and a party!

You can probably find yourself in at least one or more of these three people in the parable. Remember a time when you were extremely humbled by our errors. Maybe even frightened by how close you came to losing what’s important to you. Or a time when you were the dad, welcoming that repentant, humbled sinne. Have you ever been the jealous one, perhaps without realizing it, forgetting that we, sinners that we are, can gently show others a better way? God’s standards are much higher than OK. God wants all of our repentant hearts.

Have you seen some of the latest humorous commercials by AT&T? They claim to be America’s Best Wireless Network. The scene is a hospital room and the patient is prepping for surgery (<https://youtu.be/1YT3erQZoq4> ). The nurse is asking questions and filling out forms. The patient asks how good the surgeon is. They find out that he’s not great, but he’s okay. Then the surgeon walks in, “Guess who just got reinstated! Well, not official…” The point is, don’t settle if you know there is something better. Just OK is not OK, says AT&T. So says Jesus.

Just OK is not OK by God’s standards. God Most High has high standards. God came for ALL sinners, calling for us ALL to come near to Jesus and listen. Should we impede another hungry to hear His words, then woe to us. For Jesus also said, after calling the disciple Levi, a tax collector by the way, then discovered eating and drinking with prostitutes, “The healthy do not need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.” (Mark 2:17) In other words, Jesus isn’t just going to settle for the righteous in this world, but has come to also welcome the sinners, and if they happen to repent, then there will be a party in heaven. Saint Augustine said something similar: “The church is not a hotel for saints, it is a hospital for sinners."

We have all been these different people in the story of the Prodigal Son. God sent Jesus exactly for this –

1. for His prodigal children that we repent and find mercy
2. for the gripers – those older children – that we may learn and show mercy
3. and… so that ALL of us can get close enough to hear Him.

Let’s not just settle, but remember to welcome all others who wish to hear the word of God. For God’s standards are high and God’s mercy is wide. Thanks be to God for second chances. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Calling all Musicians:** We need some special music for Easter (April 21st). Please contact the pastor (575-708-0860) if you have a special skill to offer in worship.

**Don’t forget to feed your fish:** One Great Hour of Sharing offerings continue to be collected in support of Self-Development of People, Presbyterian Hunger Program and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. For more information, you can also visit: <http://specialofferings.pcusa.org/oghs>

**The Bible Study** meets this Wednesday at 6:00PM. If you want, bring a “brown bag” dinner. We are exploring Luke 24. Hope you can come!