**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, November 24, 2019 Reign of Christ Sunday**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

You are our Creator, our Redeemer and our Sustainer,

And we glorify you today, O Lord,

For you are Lord of all Creation,

From the whirling planets to the smallest of crawling critters

And we your people who you claim and call good.

Thank you for making us worthy of your call

To do good in your world and serve you.

In Christ our Lord, 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.**

**Isaiah 12 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

God most high,  
God with us,  
we praise you with every word we speak  
and with every moment we fall silent.  
You hear our prayer  
and sustain us along with all living things.  
You forgive our sins  
and bring us close  
to live in the goodness of your holy presence.

We pray for your awesome deeds of salvation,  
for us and to all the farthest edges of the earth.  
With the strength that raised mountains,  
calm the roaring seas of conflict;  
calm the waves of violence and oppression;  
draw all nations and peoples close to each other.

We pray for everyone who longs for your joy:  
for those who are sick or in pain from morning to night;  
for those whose grief weighs them down;  
for those who hunger and thirst  
for guidance, righteousness, or food.

Rain down your love once again, O God.  
Soften our hearts, so our lives can bear your fruit.  
Crown our lives with your goodness,  
and let everything we do overflow with blessings for your people.  
We pray in the one who bring us joy,  
Jesus the Christ, who taught us to pray:

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Time out for Teaching: Reign of Christ**

Remember the Hallelujah Chorus, from Handel’s Messiah? There is a part when they sing, “For He shall reign forever and ever…King of Kings, forever and ever. And Lord of Lords, Hallelujah, Hallelujah!” Those words are usually sung at Christmastime, because they declare the hope that comes with the birth of Jesus the Messiah. That Jesus shall reign forever!

Well that is what we recognize on the very last day of the church calendar, just before we restart the cycle with Advent and Christmas. It is a case of the “now and the not yet.”

Jesus reigns now, and yet we also hope that he shall one day reign. He reigns now. Can you think of how Jesus reigns now?

I can think of how he reigns in the hearts of so many who believe in him. What choices do people make when he is king of their lives?

I also think I could claim any other good thing in the world that happens as a sign of God’s reign. Even in the hearts of persons who don’t necessarily believe in him, but who believe in doing the right thing. I think I’ll go ahead and claim all that as part of His reign too. What do you think?

What are some things that you can think of? Anytime there is forgiveness or reconciliation in our hearts? Yes, I would like to claim that for Jesus.

The thing is, the exalted Jesus Christ, who died and was raised to sit at the right hand of God, reigns now. And chooses to act through us in so very many ways. It is important that we let God use us for good.

Listen carefully to the scriptures today. All three of our readings point to Jesus as the promised hope, the ruler of all things. In all three, Jesus is essentially crowned the Lord of Creation, provider of grace. We have received this grace and so get to let that rule our hearts. Think about how helpful that can be, since we are about to enjoy holidays with loved ones and friends, or doing something important for someone else. God is boss.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Jeremiah 23:1-6**

1Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! says the LORD. 2Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who shepherd my people: It is you who have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. So I will attend to you for your evil doings, says the LORD. 3Then I myself will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the lands where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. 4I will raise up shepherds over them who will shepherd them, and they shall not fear any longer, or be dismayed, nor shall any be missing, says the LORD.

5The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. 6In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. And this is the name by which he will be called: "The LORD is our righteousness."

**Second Reading Colossians 1:11-20**

11May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully 12giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; 16for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers-all things have been created through him and for him. 17He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

**Gospel Luke 23:33-43**

33When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. 35And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, 37and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" 38There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews."

39One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." 42Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

**Sermon: An Odd Throne**

They hung him up on a cross between two criminals, at a place called “The Skull.” He was mocked and his clothes were given away with gambling games. This man who we now call “King” was enthroned in an awful and odd way. Jesus was not called “King” by those who believed, but as a joke from those who did not dare believe.

This moment in the history of God represents both the height of God’s faithfulness during humanity’s depth of unfaithfulness. Jesus’ own followers seem nowhere to be found at this point. The only one who comes close to being a loyal subject of his kingdom is a criminal, hanging from a cross next to him. It was an odd place for a king to hang till his death.

We take this Sunday before Thanksgiving to wonder and contemplate this odd thing. We have neat theological explanations to try and explain the death of God. Some explanations are better than others. For those who dare not believe, or those who simply have many questions, they might assume that God is allowing this terrible crucifixion to happen, as if it were a cruel joke, or they doubt that it happened in that way. For those who choose to try and understand, who confess that God is better than this, we may have questions, but we trust God’s “sovereignty.” We can trust that God is glorious, powerful and trustworthy.

Sovereignty is not a word we toss around much in church. When we hear the word, it is usually used to describe nations that rule themselves, or kings and queens, sovereign, over their own kingdoms. And a little like them, God is sovereign. But unlike any nation on earth, God is completely unfettered, completely sovereign over all, King even of kings. This means that while people and nations may think we have “free will,” God is even freer. God is perfectly free and has created us to be His crowning glory.

In many medieval and ancient churches around Eastern Europe and the Middle East, that sovereignty of God is in a way represented in the mosaics, usually in domed ceilings. The domed ceilings often reflect the sky or heaven. The oldest image known is in St. Catherine’s Monastery, in the Sinai, and this mosaic dates back to somewhere between 5 and 650 AD. It shows Jesus as that sovereign, one hand up and out, blessing anyone who looks at it, and in the other hand is a book with a cross on it, symbolizing the Gospels, like a teacher and prophet holding God’s holy wisdom. One eye is darker than the other, as if to represent his fully human and fully divine aspects. Imagine seeing that image above you, his hand out to you in blessing.

The sovereign Jesus now exercises his authority from heaven, having already died and risen from the dead, sitting on the right hand of God our Creator. That happened.

So what does this mean for us? Look at our story today, as Jesus calmly and kindly extends his hand of blessing to that criminal, even though Jesus Himself is on the threshold of death. Even to the very bitter end, Jesus engages the two criminals. I’m sure He knew their crimes. Whatever they did, we will never know. We don’t know what happened to the first criminal, who was deriding and taunting him. But we do know that the other, who confessed a faith in Jesus in that moment in time, probably found at least a small comfort in knowing that he would be in Paradise, that he would see Jesus again. To know that after whatever he had done, he was assured of God’s acceptance.

This is the kind of King we worship. Who, hanging from the cross, bleeding and dying, becomes for us both judge, teacher, king and sacrifice. He does it all, freely, without anything in His way. This makes God even more interesting. For it means that God is free to operate even outside the usual parameters, and not even death can hold Him back. God can forgive things that we cannot even imagine being able to forgive.

So, this last week before the new church year, think about where we will be. Visitors at your house? Are you traveling? Who are you spending Thanksgiving with? Let us remember God’s power goes with us, for nothing limits the King of Creation. Let your life glorify God, remembering that you are God’s crown. Our reading from Colossians says it even better: “May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” It was the sovereign choice of our God to do this for us, from that very odd throne of a cross. I hope that you hold those words in your hearts, prepared to endure, joyfully giving thanks, rescued from darkness. May you find this Thanksgiving many reasons to give thanks. Amen.

**Announcements:**