**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, October 27, 2019 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**RH 407 Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart**

**RH 304 O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee**

**RH 485 Eternal God Whose Power Upholds**

**Call to Worship (call to worship)**

**Prayer of the Day**

God of Light and Love,  
help us this day to worship you  
with all of our hearts, minds, and bodies.  
Shower us with the grace of your Spirit  
that we might joyfully receive  
the message you have for us today. **Amen**.

**Call to Confession**

God saves us despite us being unworthy of that salvation.  
With humility and honesty, let us confess our sins to our God/who is slow to anger and quick to forgive.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Merciful God,  
all that we have and all that we are come from you,  
yet we prefer to focus on what we have done to justify ourselves.  
We count all that we have done to earn your love  
rather than confess our need for your grace and mercy.  
We point out the shortcomings of others  
rather than examine our own waywardness.  
Forgive us, Lord.  
Open our eyes to our need for your indiscriminate and unconditional love.  
Free us from our need to justify ourselves in your sight,  
and guide us as we welcome the fullness of your life in Jesus Christ our Lord.** (silence) **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, our help is in the name of the Lord  
who has heard our plea and answered our confession with absolution.  
In Christ’s name, I announce to you that our sins are forgiven!  
**Alleluia! Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 65:1-13**

Praise is due to you, O God, in Zion;

and to you shall vows be performed,

**O you who answer prayer!**

**To you all flesh shall come.**

When deeds of iniquity overwhelm us,

you forgive our transgressions.

**Happy are those whom you choose and bring near**

**to live in your courts.**

**We shall be satisfied with the goodness of your house,**

**your holy temple.**

By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance,

O God of our salvation;

you are the hope of all the ends of the earth

and of the farthest seas.

**By your strength you established the mountains;**

**you are girded with might.**

You silence the roaring of the seas,

the roaring of their waves,

the tumult of the peoples.

**Those who live at earth's farthest bounds are awed by your signs;**

**you make the gateways of the morning and the evening shout for joy.**

You visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it;

the river of God is full of water;

you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it.

**You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges,**

**softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.**

You crown the year with your bounty;

your wagon tracks overflow with richness.

**The pastures of the wilderness overflow,**

**the hills gird themselves with joy,**

**the meadows clothe themselves with flocks,**

**the valleys deck themselves with grain,**

**they shout and sing together for joy.**

**Prayers of the People**

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,  
as we pray for your people.

We pray for our friends and neighbors,  
who are near to us  
physically and in our affections.  
We pray especially for those we have named before you…

We pray too for our enemies,  
whose behavior we reject,  
with whom you call us to be reconciled.  
Give us grace to repent of our sins against others;  
fortitude to keep our promise even when it hurts;  
generosity to create abundance through sharing with those in need.

Keep us from stumbling as we follow in your way,  
we pray in Jesus’ name, saying together:

**Time out for Teaching: What Does an Elder Do?**

Did you know that the word “Presbyterian” is from ancient Greek? The word, “presbuteros” means “elder.”

So if someone said to you, “I am your elder,” what are they implying about your relationship to them?

Let me read this line from our Old Testament passage for today: “28Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your **old men** shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”

Elders are the backbone of every church. They bring to the table certain wisdom, life experience, their own faith and interpretation of Scripture that helps them make good choices in life. They know a lot of things that I don’t know. Except for Jenna Morris, among the elders we have right now, I am younger than all of them.

Does an elder have to be old? No! Definitely not. They have to demonstrate a commitment by faith and have the trust of the congregation who has elected them.

Does an elder have to know a lot about anything in particular? No! They have to have faith and the trust of the congregation. They also should have some idea about what they like to do, what they may be good at, but they also will find out, during their term of service, what new things they might be good at.

What do elders do each month during the meetings? Some of our elders have special areas they have devoted themselves to, such as David Goldston, who has wholeheartedly embraced the Building & Grounds responsibilities, and done well. Wayne Huffman is currently our Worship Elder, and he ensures that the offering gets picked up, people to distribute communion, and stays on task for finding musicians, and makes sure that our church records reflect what special services we have in our sanctuary, like funerals and weddings.

Julie is our Mission Elder, and she helps us get the information we need to do mission projects, like Operation Christmas Child and the One Great Hour of Sharing.

There are other things that elders do, such as chair special committees. Right now, we have appointed David to chair the nominating committee in order to find people to nominate for elders and deacons. The term of service for elder and deacon is 3 years, with an option to be reelected a second term. But once you’ve served 2 terms in a row, our Book of Order requires you take a year of rest. Technically, you are eligible to become a deacon right away, but that’s okay. The responsibilities of Deacon and Elder are very different. What’s important is that you not get burned out by serving in the same role forever and ever.

**Prayer for Illumination**

Holy God:  
with the precious jewel  
of holy scripture,  
you share with us  
the treasure of your heart.  
Engrave your covenant –  
your hopes, your dreams,  
your vision, your peace –  
upon our hearts,  
that they might beat  
as one with yours.

**Joel 2:23-32**

23O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the LORD your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before. 24The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

25I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you.

26You shall eat in plenty and be satisfied, and praise the name of the LORD your God, who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame. 27You shall know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I, the LORD, am your God and there is no other. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

28Then afterward I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

30I will show portents in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. 31The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD comes. 32Then everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the LORD has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the LORD calls.

**2 Timothy 4:6-8, 16-18**

6As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come. 7I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

16At my first defense no one came to my support, but all deserted me. May it not be counted against them! 17But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. 18The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

**Gospel Luke 18:9-14**

9He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: 10"Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' 13But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' 14I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

**Sermon: Cat Stevens, A Dog and An Atheist**

When I was in my senior year of high school, I listened incessantly to a radio station out of Washington DC, called “WCXR”. One day, the DJ announced that they would no longer play anything by Cat Stevens. His music was boycotted because he had recently declared that the author, Salman Rushdie, should be executed, because Rushdie’s new book was considered blasphemy by numerous Muslims. Stevens by the way no longer went by Cat Stevens. He himself had become a Muslim and changed his name to “Yusuf Islam.” So as Stevens declared this author should be executed, Stevens’ own music got banned.

I think it’s ironic. For back in 1971, Cat Stevens wrote a wonderful, free and happy song that went a little like this: “If you want to sing out, sing out. If you want to be free, be free… There’s a million ways to be. You know that there are. You can do what you want. The opportunity’s on. And If you find a new way, you can do it today…” But what a difference in attitude, from a free-wheeling 1970’s folksinger to someone trying to control what others should be allowed to say in public.

I am struck with how similar this sounds to how our world is today. As many people exercise their freedom of speech on the TV, radio and internet today, many decry one another for being too liberal or too conservative. I have wondered what exactly is driving this turmoil in our world. Worry, fear, anger? A need to justify ourselves? All of the above?

We want to feel justified about our convictions. We want to feel as though we did the right thing, and sometimes we use a ruler we ourselves created to measure up to, as did the Pharisee who decided that the Law of God was a checklist that he had finally gone through and ticked off one by one. The Tax Collector did not justify himself, but placed himself at God’s mercy for God to judge him, truly sorry for his past.

Our gospel reading reveals to us ways people achieve a sense of justification. The Pharisee, declares publicly, God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' In the second example, by contrast, is the tax collector, so often seen as a bad person, a sinner. But unlike that Pharisee, so often seen as someone who lived by the Law, the Tax Collector “would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!'” He’s not even trying to justify himself, but places himself at the mercy of the Lord, begging for God’s justification, rather than assuming it for himself.

It takes a lot of courage to do what the Tax Collector did, by crying out to God for mercy. God loves us always, cherishes us. But as a parent who must chastise the child, God does NOT always approve of all we say and do. If we forget to lay out our sins before God, and we just count ourselves worthy, then we might never learn how to let go and let God, free to enjoy each moment redeemed.

Humans are not very good at living in the moment. We worry more about the past and the future than the rest of the animal kingdom. As some of you know, I am finding this out after adopting two dogs. Bruce used to be homeless, so he had a lot to learn about manners. Someone might have hit him, because for a while, anytime someone would raise their hand, like this – (lift hand) - the fly swatter to kill fly, he would blink his eyes and wince a bit. He might have learned that behavior from his past, but he doesn’t dwell on the past, nor hold a grudge towards anyone. Because of this, Bruce is able to move on, become well-trained and show off just what a good boy he is!

We are called into a lifestyle of repentance; we must confess our sins, but not obsess over the past. A little like the tax collector, not normally considered by his neighbors as a “good boy,” he releases his sins and sorrows, placing it all into God’s hands. The Pharisee thinks he’s got it all wrapped up, bound for heaven. The tax collector is the one best-prepared to move on from that moment, and grow into a better human.

The past is gone, the future hasn’t happened yet. There is no time like this moment to place our lives back into God’s hands. When I was a hospital chaplain resident, one day I was paged to the ER. Expecting to walk into a fast-paced situation with fear and tears, I was surprised to meet a middle-aged man, sitting up in bed, looking rather calm. When he learned I was a chaplain, he said, “I don’t need a chaplain. No offense, but I’m an atheist.” All he wanted was a Living Will form. I explained that this was part of my job as chaplain, to help people with the paperwork. We got to talking. He was a Veteran of WW2. He stopped believing in God while fighting at the Battle of Iwo Jima. Then he said, “I am not worried about the future and I’m not afraid of dying. I have always said, ‘The past is gone. The future hasn’t happened yet. The present … is a gift.’”

Take it from your dog. Take it from this atheist. The present is God’s gift to us and there is no time like now for us to release our past to God and put the future into His hands. As we sometimes say, after our prayer of confession, “Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation. The past is gone, and a new life has begun.” You can be free, to grow into a better human, when you place it all in His hands. If you want to be free, then be free. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes:** We are preparing for this year’s shipment of Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes. Please pick up your shoebox and instruction booklet today! We need your shoeboxes back at our church on Sunday, November 10th, so that the Methodists have time to pack it all in. Bring them to church and we will pray a blessing over them as part of the offering.

**Halloween/All Saints Party November 1st:** Mark your calendars for our Halloween Party on Friday, November 1st. Have a cool Halloween costume? Now you can wear it a second time. We start gathering for fun around 5:30PM. Please bring a snacky food item to share with the party. Time for fun!