**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, September 13, 2020 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Hymns:**

**BH 559 We Gather Together**

**RH 473 Blest Be The Tie That Binds**

**BH 339 Be Thou My Vision**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

**Call to Confession**

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

Through God’s grace we are washed and forgiven.
**Thanks be to God! Hallelujah! Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 114:1-8 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Holy One, in your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Spark of Life,
creation was envisioned by you and is sustained by you;
in gratitude we pray for the world:
that its riches and resources be used responsibly and fairly;
that its rulers and leaders may govern with justice, compassion and humility;
that humankind may live with understanding and respect,
noticing what unites us;
In your love and mercy: **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Prophet of Love,
you lived among us to teach us – to show us – how to love;
in humility we pray for siblings around the globe:
for those dehumanized by their struggle for existence, may we listen;
for those overshadowed by the constancy of death, may we notice;
for those besieged by fear, anger and relentless peril, may we show up;
for those ensnared by systems beyond their control, may we demand change.
In your love and mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Holy One, Breath of Being,
you are here – in this very moment – as constant presence and insistent voice;
in gratitude we pray…with boldness we pray:
inundate the world with humanity,
overwhelm the world with truth,
flood the world with kindness,
upset our indifference,
accelerate our action,
fortify our resolve,
compel us to authentic discipleship
that nurtures creation, embodies love and breathes life.
In your love and mercy, **hear our prayer.**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Archaeology and the Bible”**

Today I want to talk to you a little about Archaeology and why it matters to us as Bible readers.

Archaeology is the study of early human life. Our knowledge has an impact on what we can say we understand about the Bible.

There are some ways in which we aren’t aware of what archaeology does to help us understand the Bible better. And that is in how the Bible was organized.

If you were to look at the Bible in its original languages of Hebrew and Greek, there are a tremendous number of notes and comments at the bottom of practically every page. These footnotes refer to any of the dozens of different sources of information that they have about the words and phrases used in the body of the text. These are manuscripts, actual handwritten bits and pieces of the Scripture which can be dated back to ancient times. For example, the New Testament is made up of many bits and pieces of archaeological evidence of what Jesus said and what His believers wrote about, and copies made of these to pass along to others.

Scholars have collected these documents so that we know what the New Testament looks like and says. They have dated them to know which of these manuscripts are the oldest. And the oldest ones are usually the most accurate to what the first believers read as Scripture too.

So here’s why this matters – the Scriptures we have are made of a bunch of manuscripts. Some are little tiny bits with just some words and phrases on them. Others are entire letters or books from the Bible. Because they are copied by hand over and over again, using ink that smears and by the light of oil lamps, some of these documents have holes in them and ink smears that make it hard to make out a few letters or words. Oh, and these documents are not all identical.

The Bible scholars are the ones who have to take a look at all of these documents and determine which ones are the most authentic Word of God. And, if anyone ever found a new set of manuscripts, like the Dead Sea Scrolls, they would have to take them into account and figure out whether they should be included in what they know about the words of the Bible. What do you think of that? Do you have any questions or insight into this?

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Exodus 14:19-31**

19The angel of God who was going before the Israelite army moved and went behind them; and the pillar of cloud moved from in front of them and took its place behind them. 20It came between the army of Egypt and the army of Israel. And so the cloud was there with the darkness, and it lit up the night; one did not come near the other all night.

21Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. 22The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. 23The Egyptians pursued, and went into the sea after them, all of Pharaoh’s horses, chariots, and chariot drivers. 24At the morning watch the LORD in the pillar of fire and cloud looked down upon the Egyptian army, and threw the Egyptian army into panic. 25He clogged their chariot wheels so that they turned with difficulty. The Egyptians said, “Let us flee from the Israelites, for the LORD is fighting for them against Egypt.”

26Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers.“ 27So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the LORD tossed the Egyptians into the sea. 28The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained. 29But the Israelites walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.

30Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. 31Israel saw the great work that the LORD did against the Egyptians. So the people feared the LORD and believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.

**Gospel Matthew 18:21-35**

21Then Peter came and said to him, “Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?” 22Jesus said to him, “Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times.

23“For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves. 24When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him. 25and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. 26So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.’ 27And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. 28But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, ‘Pay what you owe.’ 29Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you.’ 30But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. 31When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. 32Then his lord summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. 33Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?’ 34And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. 35So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart.”

**Sermon: “Saved in the Waters” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

There is a debate going on in the world of Biblical Archaeology over a stone fragment. Actually, it is a fragment of a statue pedestal with Egyptian hieroglyphics. The hieroglyphics are difficult to read because it is broken off, but many people think they spell “Israel.” Some argue it says “Northern.” We may never know, if we cannot find a similar object or the other fragments.

This matters because if it says “Israel” on it, then it will change what we already know about the Israelites’ Exodus from Egypt. What we currently know is based on another stone carving called the “Merneptah Stele” (also known as the Israel Stele), which stands in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Merneptah’s Stele until recently has been believed to be the earliest known mention of that little nation of Israelites, 1208 BC. But this other stone fragment is from 1400 BC, about 200 years earlier. Merneptah claims responsibility for getting rid of the Israelites. He is the one who says on his stone carving that “Israel is no more and their seed too.”

The reason why that stele matters to us is that it gives us a time frame for about when the Exodus from Egypt actually happened. If the pedestal really says “Israel” on it, then the Exodus happened earlier than we thought. External evidence of what has happened in history can certainly be a helpful means of corroborating what we have written in the Bible. It can be a true comfort when archaeological evidence confirms something that we’ve read in Scriptures, because so often we are left with a story that calls only for us to just have faith. And it helps to know this as there are others who seriously doubt what the Bible says about history. The funny thing about this Egyptian stuff is, it’s from the point of view of someone who hated God’s people and wanted to get rid of them. Merneptah boasts of victory, but what we have here is a story of God’s victory, through water.

God used water to save the Israelites and it called for Moses to do his part in it, by holding his hand above the water. Then it says that the Lord caused the water to part. Remember when Charleton Heston stood by the Jordan with hundreds of Israelites and he announced that God would do battle for them. In the 1956 movie “The Ten Commandments,” we are given a tremendous example of the battle God did for the Hebrews, and also for us. It was of course Cecel B. DeMille’s amazing direction and the special effects which were truly amazing for 1956. But it is a grand scene as the clouds fill the sky, the waters of the Red Sea roil under the wind, until they part, revealing stones and dry land below.

Water brings us all so much joy, when we get it in New Mexico, but don’t we know how much it represents chaos to others in the world. Water, roiling and powerful, represents to many disorder, disaster and something to be feared. This is not the only place in Scripture where God uses powerful water to save humanity. Genesis 7, with the help of Noah and the ark, for instance. And of course, Baptism. Out of the waters God chose to also save you.

Every so often, I meet someone who will say to me, “I was baptized, but I really don’t see why it matters so much.” Persons who say this to me are usually baptized on the fly, usually under pressure, or even against their own wishes. So, persons who go through life like this are not informed about the meaning behind it. It is sad that they don’t know why it matters. For it is God’s way of including us in God’s history of salvation. It is our way of participating in God’s kingdom. Baptism marks our journey of faith from death to new life. When we go under the water, we die to our old lives and ways that lead to sin and death. When we come back up from the waters, we are new creations.

Often people use the word “saved” to describe some specific day in their lives when they made that all-important commitment to follow Jesus Christ, and usually it involved baptism. They can even mark the specific date when that happened. But “saved” from what?

I think the better question could be “saved FOR what?” or “FOR whom?” I think that the best answer to that is that our salvation gives us a purpose and the obvious answer is we are saved for God and God’s plan. Moses was saved from the waters – his name even means “out of the waters” – and he was saved for a reason. You too. For what purpose has God saved you?

Jesus provides a very powerful example of our purpose in the gospel reading today. It is the parable of the wicked servant. It can be best summed up when the angry king confronts his ungrateful servant by saying, “Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?” For the king had forgiven his servant’s debt, but is angry to see that the servant did not have the same mercy for another servant of the king. It is truly a call to “pass it on” because we have been saved. Pass on the mercy that you yourself have received. For we are all saved in the waters, all equally members of the kingdom of heaven. Saved in the waters from chaos and death, to live a new life showing mercy and receiving it too. Let us pass it on, the mercy we first received. Thanks be to God for His power to save! Amen.

**THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**Session Meeting Today:** Please remember, Elders, that we have a meeting right after worship today.

**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.

**Church Lockdown Continues.** Friends, please be mindful that the Fellowship Hall side of our building is still locked down until the Session has had a chance to meet and discuss it. They have a meeting today after church.

**Alternatives to Church Events** – Anyone who would like to meet for a meal outside at a local restaurant, or gather at someone’s home for fellowship, or go for a walk together, please call the pastor at 575-708-0860. Other suggestions for how we can still fellowship with each other, are welcome.