**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 15, 2019, Twenty-Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**RH 397 More Love to Thee, O Christ Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

**RH 198 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross**

**RH 399 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Show us your ways, O Lord!  
Lead us in your truth, and teach us.  
Open our eyes, minds, and hearts  
to know your will and to follow it.  
Reveal your vision for us,  
and keep us focused and faithful to what you would have us do.  
Bring us together to worship and work for your purpose,  
and move us forward into your future. 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 98 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

God of all the earth,  
we call on you because we know you will answer.  
Hear us now!  
It seems like all the powers of the world are working together,  
making plans against the well-being of your beloved people.

The forces of division set the strong against the weak  
and exploit our need to care for those closest to us.  
Reveal your enduring strength that rises up within human communities.

Insecurity and uncertainty drive us to hoard the good things of life.  
Open our clenched fists, restore our depleted earth, and join us to one another.

Violence, illness, poverty, and death pursue us,  
especially those on our hearts today whom we lift up before you…  
Drive away everything that takes away life,  
and send forth the healing power of your name.

Let all the world know the grace of your reign,  
for you alone are the sovereign of all.  
We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who taught us to pray, saying…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Time Out For Teaching: The Corinthian Christians**

Who were the Corinthians? What do you know about the Christians Paul wrote to in the port city of Corinth?

Corinth was a large city on the coast of Greece, amid the islands. It was a port city along the Mediterranean, which means that it was populated by many people of a wide variety of ethnic groups and languages, and religions, of course. It also had people of many economic levels, from the wealthy merchants to working class and probably the poorest of the poor as well.

The church in Corinth was a reflection, for the most part, of that diverse city. And it is hard to be a church when it is so intermixed with people of many levels and backgrounds. It can be difficult for people to understand and appreciate each other.

So, this diversity was probably one of the reasons why it was difficult for them to get along, because their backgrounds informed them about what was okay and not okay to do. They had different ways of approaching problems and different ways of understanding their practices, such as our comportment in worship, our understanding about marriage, our understanding about the cross, what does it mean to say Jesus died for us.

So, Paul wrote to the Corinthians to help bring about a perspective that the only way to proclaim Christ’s death for us is to die to ourselves and the things that divide us from one another. That takes humility.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Numbers 21:4b-9**

4From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. 5The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."6Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. 7The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. 8And the Lord said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live."9So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

**Gospel John 3:13-17**

13Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. 14We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. 15All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. 16We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. 17How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?

**1 Corinthians 1:18-24**

18For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." 20Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. 22For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, 23but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling-block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

**Sermon: Only Fools Rush In**

“Wise men say, only fools rush in, but I can’t help falling in love with you…” (Elvis sang that better than anyone I have ever heard, in my opinion.)

I love that line. I’m not a big Elvis fan, but to me it sums up how God must feel about us. God can’t help but love us, God is a fool in love with us. God is our parent. God is our redeemer. God did something that might even look stupid to those who are not in the know about grace. God took a risk on us, choosing to do the foolish thing by becoming weak and human, entering our condition, and going to the greatest lengths for us and for our salvation, by dying on a cross.

The cross is foolishness to those who are not “in the know.” Foolish because God doesn’t want to force us, twist our arms into believing this. Foolish because God leaves it up to us to choose our path in this life, desiring our hearts until we turn to Him. It’s foolish, like a parent who is willing to allow the child to meander farther and farther away, while hoping that child eventually shall return as a mature person.

Unfortunately, one of the troubles with allowing the child to wander off and find her way back home is the child might not recognize home anymore. A person who never returns to God is an even bigger fool than the one who returns, as prodigal as he might be.

There is a far deeper wisdom behind God’s foolishness. Paul writes, “Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” For the foolishness of God is wiser than any scribe or debater of any age. The foolishness of God is what saves us and what we get to demonstrate in our daily lives. Now we are the fools for Christ and are expected to act like it too. And it is a wisdom that rather should take the world by surprise. That wisdom is based first and foremost on God’s love. A love based on kindness, respect. The love Jesus speaks of in our Gospel reading. He defines love like this: “We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us-and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?”

This kind of extreme love, the kind that causes us fools to rush in, isn’t necessarily a love that is haphazard or lacks caution. It is instead a love that is able to receive a brother or sister with kindness. The importance of that foolishness in our wisdom is probably best summed up later in the book of 1st Corinthians, which reads a lot like a song. “Love is Patient. Love is Kind…If I sing with the tongues of angels but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” If I have not love in any of the things I do, then I am not worth anything. Paul wants us to remember that love is the necessary ingredient to our wisdom, love is the thing that reminds us when to be a little bit foolish occasionally, when called for. Love is the necessary ingredient in all things that we do, and to love with humility and courage. Love is our ability to show welcome, kindness. It just has to be the way that leads us to true forgiveness, when we give up something of ourselves in order that another may live. True love is the attribute that most closely resembles God’s very own character. For God’s nickname is love.

This big news about the cross must have hit the Corinthians in a new and fresh way. We suspect that they had committed a variety of types of sins against each other and they needed to hear more about how to rise above their hurt. They had to overcome their fears and face what they had done in the past to injure each other. Paul wants them to remember that no matter who thinks they are wiser, there is always someone else much wiser and that wisdom is based on God’s foolish heart, rushing in to save them. What if we should be so wise that we are willing to choose on the basis of love? Remember last Sunday’s story about Paul’s friends Philemon and Onesimus? Paul tried to persuade Philemon to welcome Onesimus back. Philemon was expected in a way to swallow his own pride and forgive. Onesimus had to swallow his own pride and return, at the risk of not being forgiven. It’s the foolishness of God that can lead us all to do what others thinks is impossible. The foolishness of that cross, God’s utter failure, is also God’s greatest triumph on behalf of us all. It’s the biggest challenge of our lives, to be as foolish as God. But it is the way God has chosen to use us to save the world. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Rummage Sale is coming!** We need your help in the way of donations, and to take some time out to help us get ready for the sale. Do you know where we send our “leftovers” after the sale? Ministry of H.O.P.E. The Sale is October 4-5 from 9AM-3PM.

**Session meeting** is this Thursday at 4:00PM in the library