**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 1, 2019, Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

We bless your holy name, almighty God,

Maker of our lives.

Let our praise of you today,

May your Holy Spirit elevate our minds

To the loftiest of thoughts of you

Your will, your salvation for your creation.

So that we may leave here today,

Filled by your presence

To be your presence in the world.

In the name of our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Almighty God, 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 81:1, 10-16 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

**Time Out For Teaching: Getting Grounded**

There is a movement out there in the global church today that has chosen to promote “Back to Church Sunday” on September 15th. It’s an organization called “Outreach International.”

They have a ton of promotional materials they’d like to sell us, but are so eager to encourage the world to get back to church, they’ll send you some things for free. So, I requested free brochures from them about prayer, both in English and Spanish.

The spirit of the message is good though. It is someone’s way of inviting people to church, particularly those who have stopped going but could use a little positivity to feel welcome back.

To me, the best reason for a person to come to church is it can be grounding for our spirits. Here, there are no mean people. We are a forgiving and welcoming people. We might describe ourselves as family, dear friends.

Inviting others to church so that they might find a place among our wonderful people is one thing. But we ourselves need to also be grounded in our own faith.

So how does coming to church ground you during the week or during our time of worship?

How would you share that with someone else?

Finally, I want to share with you a plan I have to get us thinking about those questions more. The church needs to grow, you need more people to share this worship space with you. And most importantly, we have been charged by Jesus Christ to do this kind of work. The Great Commission says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them…”

I will be rolling out a series of questions in the next few weeks, which I hope will get us all thinking and praying about the opportunities ahead of us. The good news is, when we do God’s will, God is there to help us.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16**

1Let mutual love continue. 2Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.3Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured. 4Let marriage be held in honor by all, and let the marriage bed be kept undefiled; for God will judge fornicators and adulterers. 5Keep your lives free from the love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, "I will never leave you or forsake you." 6So we can say with confidence, "The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can anyone do to me?"

7Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. 8Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.

15Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. 16Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

**Luke 14:1, 7-14**

1On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

7When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your place', and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

12He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

**Sermon: The Good Life**

Jesus is talking about a big banquet, where all are invited. We are all invited to the big banquet. And so are all those who we would have been least likely to invite. This story from Luke details some instructions on proper “table manners,” in such a way that tells us that God’s banquet is so large, that it is to bless each and every person in the world, including the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. The invitation is there.

See, God really wants us to have a good life. A good life might be described in Jesus’ two little parables about humility at a dinner party. First, Jesus teaches us how to be a good dinner guest. “He who exalts himself shall be humbled and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.” And right after this, Jesus teaches us how to be good dinner hosts, the hostess with the “mostest.” He says, rather than invite those who will return the favor sometime later, invite those who have no way to really repay you. Talk about humbling oneself, by lifting up the least of these in the world. It is a celebration of the good life, a life of sharing and blessing the others of God’s creation.

But how would we even begin to play hosts to the variety of persons whom Jesus describes? Where do we find them? It could begin with just exploring what surrounds our church. Go for a walk in this neighborhood and your eyes will be opened. The neighborhood surrounding our church is not the same as it was when this church was established. It’s different now from what it was like even 20 years ago. We don’t really know much about the people who live within a few blocks of this church, although there are two or three who have come to us because of Rummage Sales. We advertise, we put things out there, and we invite people we associate with.

But one of the reasons why we have trouble reaching the unchurched person is the ones who need it most are those we don’t normally hang out with. The crippled, the poor, the hungry, all those who Jesus mentions who should become the guests of honor. God wants us to bless the world, including the least of these in the world. If we don’t know them, then we cannot do what Jesus is telling us to do here. If we cannot invite them, then we aren’t fully living the “good life.”

The Good Life is fleshed out much more by the Letter to the Hebrews today. It charges its readers with a long string of parenetic speech, that is encouraging speech in the form of imperatives, commands, describing the well-rounded Christian life. A good life in relationship to one another, how to live richly, even if poor. Maybe you remember one Christmas time about 3 years ago, when we did that very thing. Do you remember when Presbyterian Women decided one year to use our blessings from Rummage Sales to invite the neighborhood to lunch? We printed invitations, we ordered food from Watson’s and set up the Fellowship Hall. Betty Ragan and I went door-to-door knocking on them, telling them about our luncheon, inviting them, no strings attached. It was Christmastime. It was cold outside. People were busy. But sowing the seeds of blessing to our neighbors, even if they didn’t all come to lunch and we had lots of leftovers, was received by all of them with surprise and appreciation. We only wanted to share the good life with them. And by simply inviting them, they saw that God’s blessings were real, because we knocked on their door and personally invited them.

We have it good here, friends. We have friendship and love to spare. God is there to help us find new ways to share His church with the world. All it takes is our figuring out what we can do to become a blessing to the neighborhood. Why? Because Jesus is the host of this dinner party and we are all His invited guests. Let us remember this as we approach His table to receive his blessings now. Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

**Words of Institution**

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts. **We lift them to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

God of Every People,
you created the world long before this nation or any other.
In the first days of creation, you said, “Let there be light,”
and light separated itself from the night.
How can we ever comprehend your power?
How can we ever be worthy of your love?
How can we ever measure up to your goodness?

Hear us as we proclaim your majesty:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord. God of power at might.
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.**

**Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.**

Christ came to this world as a helpless infant,
showing us that the weakness of humanity is not beyond redemption.
Born as a refugee is a scary and violent world,
your son came as one of us to show us the way.

Being born, he is a vehicle of your love.
Walking many miles, he teaches us to travel to the unknown.
Teaching love, he helps us understand our capacity for compassion.
Healing the sick, he inspires us to share your healing power.
Teaching the broken, he reminds us that we are works in progress.
Sacrificing himself, he shows us that love triumphs over hate.

We give you thanks that the Lord Jesus,
on the night before he died, took bread,
and after giving thanks to you, he broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take, eat. This is my body, broken for you.

In the same way Jesus took the cup, saying:
This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood,
shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.
Whenever you drink it, do this in remembrance of me.

We gather this day, God of all majesty and power,
to lift up your holy name and proclaim the mystery of faith:

**Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.**

Giver of All Goodness and Grace,
bless this our gathering in your name.
Bless our worship of you
and bless those who worship in your name around the world.

Through Christ, with Christ, in Christ,
all glory and honor are yours, Holy God,
both now and always. **Amen.**

**Distribution of the Elements**

**Prayer after Communion**

Faithful God,
you have fed us at this table
along with that great multitude of your faithful people.
Keep us faithful to your call,
and abide with us always,
that we may serve you in all things.
In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Green Chile Gals will not be meeting this Monday because of the Labor Day Holiday.** We will get together next Monday in Fellowship Hall. Ladies, drop by after work for a little fellowship and fun. The fun starts around 6:00PM.

**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. Wouldn’t you like to open up a box and not know what’s inside?

**Jesus is the model servant, when he washed the feet of his own disciples during the Passover meal. We can remember how Jesus behaved as an example of the teachings we hear from him, such as he does in Luke 14.**

**I am thinking of the show “Upstairs Downstairs” – servants who knew that their place was living downstairs and they only came upstairs when they were there to serve.**

**I am also thinking of (for Hebrews) examples of what happens when terrible crimes are committed and then to cover it up, more must be committed. It is a downwards spiral that can only stop by becoming humbled and repentant. An extreme example of depravity, but a reminder nonetheless of our own mistakes and how they affect others. Hebrews speaks to a well-rounded life that holds up all areas of our life to a high standard. It is the “fence” one can build around oneself to hold oneself accountable to God but also to one another.**

**The story in Luke today is a place when Jesus teaches us a cautionary tale!**

**He speaks of the “pride of place” we feel when we assume that we are deserving of honor. He cautions us to not assume too much! The scenario is this- if you’re invited to a dinner party, do not assume that you should be the one to sit in place of honor right by the host. If you do, you might risk being “bumped” down to make space for that guest or those guests and that would be humiliating. I’m pretty sure that every one of us can remember a time when we have felt the sting of that humiliation.**

**From Slow Church: Needless to say, it was a sobering Christmas Eve. But one long-term effect on the congregation was to make it more attentive to its downtown neighbors. Sometimes the beauty of the world grabs your attention; at other times, tragedy does. Many members confessed to having previously paid scant attention to the folks who lived right across the street from our place of gathering. . . . And so the church began to examine ways it might be a better neighbor to these long-neglected folks across the street. So by the time [conversations]arose about moving to the suburbs [almost a decade later], the church was for the first time becoming involved with its neighbors. And this was the reason the congregation decided to stay, to abide, in downtown Johnson City. We believed we were there for a reason and that to leave would involve not merely abandoning an address and piece of property, but would mean abandoning these neighbors with whom we were trying to be in relationship. And so we stayed.**

**We are absorbed into the interconnected life of God’s creation. Just as Christ becomes food for us, we give ourselves away and become food for others. We see that there is no room for us to be mere consumers—people who take without giving—and that “things” (including technology, programs and all the accoutrements of a McDonaldized society) must be evaluated in light of how they bind us together with God and humanity.**

## Tucumcari leaders remain optimistic

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August 21, 2019



Ron Warnick

A student walks into Mesalands Community College on Monday morning as the wind turbine at college's North American Wind Research and Training Center turns in the background.

While the Coronado Partners group is far from giving up on obtaining a license to build a racetrack-casino in Tucumcari, the state's recent decision not to grant a sixth "racino" license leaves Tucumcari and Quay County again facing hard uncertainties about their economic future.

In the wake of lingering regrets over the New Mexico Gaming Commission's decision not to grant a sixth license, for which the Tucumcari site was one of five competitors, local economic leaders remain optimistic about the city and county's economic revival.

**An uphill climb**

Like all of rural New Mexico, however, Quay County faces an uphill struggle in its efforts toward regaining vibrancy in its economy, they agreed.

"It's tough to do economic development in agricultural areas, because it's all going to more urban areas," said Christopher Erickson, a New Mexico State University economist who compiled reports for Coronado Partners in its attempts to bring a racino to Tucumcari.

Erickson said the racino in Tucumcari "would have been an obvious fit."

Tucumcari and Quay County, he said should be searching for "an attraction," that would draw people to the area. The racino would have served as that kind of lure.

Tucumcari and Quay County have continued to lose population and continue to suffer economic decline. The county lost nearly 9% of its population between 2010 and 2018, according to current U.S. Census estimates. Nearly one of every four Quay County residents, 23.6%, lives in poverty, and 37.5% of its residents younger than 18 old are impoverished, according to Census data.

In Quay County, 47% of the population 16 years old and older were in the work force. The state's rate was 58%.

The census bureau reports 15.4% of Quay County's population younger than 65 have a disability, compared to the state's 10.4%.

More than a decade of drought conditions has decimated agriculture in the county, according to Pat Vanderpool, executive director of the Greater Tucumcari Economic Development Corporation.

"We used to have farm implement stores in the Tucumcari area," he said, "but those went away.

An informal survey Vanderpool conducted during a series of "Lunch and Learn" sessions from March 18 to May 20 revealed local people interested in economic development saw problems with grocery supplies, housing, a lack of local contractors, a lack of medical specialists and schools (which were also listed as a strength) posed obstacles to growth in the county.

Others see a small workforce in the county as another deterrent to growth, even as Vanderpool can point to the county's status as a "Work Ready Community," as defined by numbers who have achieved satisfactory scores on Work Keys, a work skill assessment devised by ACT.

ACT is the nonprofit company that publishes the ACT test familiar to high school graduates.

**The county's strengths**

The county's economic decline seems to continue despite assets that Vanderpool, Erickson and others can quickly tick off.

These include:

• Tucumcari's location on Interstate 40, which crosses the continent, and on the route of U.S. 54, which extends from central Illinois to El Paso, Texas

• The busy Union Pacific Railroad tracks and sidings that split Tucumcari's north and south sides. Tucumcari was once a major railroad hub.

• Tucmcari's well-preserved stretch of Route 66, which draws nostalgic domestic tourism and fans of the Mother Road from all over the world.

• The Dan C. Trigg Memorial Hospital

• The Tucumcari Municipal Airport.

• Low housing costs and property tax rates.

• Plenty of wind and sunshine for renewable energy development.

• Mesalands Community College

• Speedy fiber-optic internet service.

Areas to explore

Vanderpool said he thinks efforts to revitalize the county's economy should focus on renewable energy development; metal fabrication, using silversmithing, farrier skills and bronze-casting taught at Mesalands; business based on agriculture; and the manufacture of outdoor recreation goods using composite materials.

Composite materials are used to make bows for archery and rifle stocks, Vanderpool said.

Groesbeck is encouraging Mesalands' involvement in outdoor equipment, but his current ambitions for the college also include expansion of the North American Wind Research and Training Center to include solar energy education and training, and a hands-on media center to develop skills in film, video production and web design.

Groesbeck is also seeking to expand agriculture and agri-business education at Mesalands, and increased use of the college's science laboratories.

In addition, he plans make Mesalands a resident campus, one that hosts students from elsewhere who live in the area while studying.

He also seeks to make Mesalands a center for developing entrepreneurship, teaming with Vanderpool to adapt the former ALCO store's 40,000-square-foot site to be a "business incubator," a low-cost space that new or expanding businesses can use to launch new ventures.

Groesbeck said his plans to expand the college's training and education opportunities will help attract more talent to Tucumcari and Quay County

Groesbeck, an economist by education, said a study done in recent years, for him, solved an old "chicken-and-egg" problem for economists: "What comes first, people or jobs?"

The answer, Groesbeck said, "is clearly people."

People equate to a workforce, he said.

"What's the first thing someone looking for a factory site or a large facility looks for in an area?" he asked, answering, "a workforce. If it's not there, they don't go there."

The next question for Quay County, he said, echoing Erickson, is, "What attracts people to Quay County?"

His plans to recruit resident students at Mesalands, coupled with other features he said the county should be actively marketing, should be attracting more people to the county.

The county's attractions, he said, include scenic beauty, a pleasant climate, Ute Lake and Conchas Lake nearby, and the presence of a hospital, the community college and golf courses, including the Tucumcari Municipal Golf Course and courses at Ute and Conchas lakes.

"What are we doing to market the amenities of Quay County?" he asked.

Locally, he said, the city and county should "prime the pump" with "good government, community pride and leadership."

**Retirement community**

Groesbeck also agreed with Charles Lehman, treasurer of the New Mexico Career Development Center, and Robert Grassberger, a professor emeritus at the University of New Mexico, that Tucumcari is among many rural New Mexico cities and towns that would make excellent retirement communities.

Vanderpool met Grassberger and Lehman at a recent conference on the prospect of retirement communities in New Mexico. Among the subjects discussed was developing a "Certified Retirement Community" designation for New Mexico municipalities.

Lehman particularly noted Mesalands as an attraction for retirees.

"Research shows that retirees look for a community college" when they seek out their retirement homes.

Lehman also said retirees would enjoy Tucumcari's "opportunities for fishing" at Ute and Conchas lakes.

In addition, Tucumcari offers the nostalgia of old Route 66, a collection of museums, a reasonable climate "free of earthquakes and hurricanes and only a rare threat of tornadoes," its low cost of living and low property taxes.

In addition, he said, "More retirees are seeking rural lifestyles. They don't want to go to urban areas like Albuquerque and Santa Fe."

He suggested Tucumcari should seek out a retirement community developer like Del Webb, the company that founded Sun City, a well-known retirement community in Arizona.

Grassberger said the state as a whole could benefit from an effort to keep retirees in-state, especially as the meaning of retirement is changing to include alternate activities and ventures as well as leisure.

"Retirees are two to three times more likely to start a company than a millennial," Grassberger said in an interview with New Mexico Business First. "And why wouldn't they? They have the knowledge, they have the resources and they have the time."

While most community leaders see the possible end of the racino dream as a major setback, they also seem to agree that, as Vanderpool noted, "It doesn't mean the end for Tucumcari" or the county