**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, September 20, 2020 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 310 Take My Life and Let It Be**

**RH 434 Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken**

**RH 79 Lord, Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

**Lord of Life,**

**We stand in your presence in need of worship today. We place all of our troubles and anxieties into your hands as we join our hearts with each other and with believers in every time and place. With your Holy Spirit, bring our hearts, minds and bodies to attention once again, to your presence, your power and pure grace. Through Christ our Savior. Amen.**

**Call to Confession**

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation—the old has gone, and the new has come. Yet we often have difficulty living in that new reality, clinging to the old ways that have passed. When we confess our sin, we make room for God’s truth to dwell in us, clearing the path for a new way of life. Before God, with the people of God, let us confess our faults and our failings. Let us pray.

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

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting. From before the beginning until long beyond our imagination, God’s love endures. Know that you are forgiven, loved and free.

**Thanks be to God! Hallelujah! Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 105:1-6, 37-45 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

We exalt you, O God our Sovereign,  
and we bless your name forever and ever.  
Every day proclaims your blessing,  
and lifetime after lifetime sings praise to your name.  
To you, whose greatness never ends,  
we lift these prayers for your beloved people.

We pray for children and generations yet to come,  
that they may know and praise your works with joy.  
We pray for elders who ponder your glorious splendor,  
that they may rejoice in your marvelous works.  
We pray for those who have little to depend on except your might,  
that all your people may have everything they need.  
We pray for those who are sick, suffering, or grieving,  
that their lives might bear the mark of your great goodness  
and that, healed and whole, they may sing of your righteous deeds.

We pray to you, for you are gracious and full of compassion,  
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
We pray to you, in the name of the risen Christ,  
in whom we pray together:  
The Lord’s Prayer

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Wilderness Miracles”**

We are traveling through the wilderness now with Moses, Aaron, Miriam and the band of Israelites. They have been on the run since Exodus chapter 14. They are complaining against their leaders, that they could have stayed in Egypt and had more to eat.

But the Lord hears and sees all things. And just as while they were in Egypt and God said He could hear them crying out, God hears their complaints now too.

So the Lord tells Moses what to tell the people – that they should expect to see meat appear in the evenings and to have bread in the mornings. And when they have these things they shall remember that this is the Lord who brought them out of Egypt.

So, Moses declares on the morning that this “bread” appeared, that it is the Lord who provided these things. The people ask “what is it?” which in Hebrew is “Manu?” That’s where we get the word “manna,” by the way. It basically means “What is it?”

They were also instructed to only gather as much as they needed for that day, except for the 6th day, when they could gather enough for two days. That was so that they didn’t have to gather food on the Sabbath. Every day God provided manna. Every day for 40 years they depended on the Lord for their daily food.

What I think is so powerful about this is God wanted them to know they could depend on Him. As one commentary says, being fed and directly dependent on another is a very personal thing. No longer did the Israelites know the Lord as the God of their ancestors. They knew the Lord personally.

Can you remember any other wilderness miracles with food?

-water from a rock

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Exodus 16:2-15**

2The whole congregation of the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. 3The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.”

4Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to rain bread from heaven for you, and each day the people shall go out and gather enough for that day. In that way I will test them, whether they will follow my instruction or not. 5On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather on other days.“ 6So Moses and Aaron said to all the Israelites, “In the evening you shall know that it was the Lord who brought you out of the land of Egypt, 7and in the morning you shall see the glory of the Lord, because he has heard your complaining against the Lord. For what are we, that you complain against us?” 8And Moses said, “When the Lord gives you meat to eat in the evening and your fill of bread in the morning, because the Lord has heard the complaining that you utter against him — what are we? Your complaining is not against us but against the Lord.”

9Then Moses said to Aaron, “Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, ‘Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.’” 10And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. 11The Lord spoke to Moses and said, 12“I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

13In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. 14When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. 15When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.”

**Matthew 20:1-16**

1“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. 2After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. 3When he went out about nine o’clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; 4and he said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. 5When he went out again about noon and about three o’clock, he did the same. 6And about five o’clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, ‘Why are you standing here idle all day?’ 7They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You also go into the vineyard.’ 8When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, ‘Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first.’ 9When those hired about five o’clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. 10Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. 11And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, 12saying, ‘These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.’ 13But he replied to one of them, ‘Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? 14Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. 15Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ 16So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”

**Sermon: “Better Later than Never!” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Here is another of many parables about wealthy landowners and their slaves. And usually in these parables, you can draw a pretty clear line between who the people represent. The landowner usually represents God to us. The workers, often called slaves or servants, ordinarily represent **us**. But let’s investigate a little further...

The very first sentence in this reading says… “The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning…” It is an awkward start to a story. Is the kingdom of heaven like the landowner going out to look for workers? Yes. Is it like when he the landowner goes out finding some people standing idle and offering them a job too? Yes. Is the kingdom of heaven like when the early birds see the latecomers and they get a little jealous? I guess so. But it also includes the landowner’s response, saying, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” If we take that first sentence seriously, then everything after it seems to be a depiction of the Kingdom of Heaven. Complaints, and God’s own idea of a fair wage.

A lot is going on, when we picture this scenario as comparable to the kingdom of heaven. It’s full of early birds and latecomers. The wages are fair, because the wages are not determined by the workers, even though the workers all agreed to their wages upon hiring. The wages are determined by the landowner, el jefe, the boss of everything. It was a hierarchy, with the landowner at the top. But Jesus’ first audience, hearing this parable, would have understood this even better than we. For they lived in a kingdom, an Empire in fact. They understood what it was like to be a subject and to be subject to everyone who stood in authority over them. And there is always someone standing in authority over someone else.

I don’t know just what it must be like to be a subject, except when subjected to the unpleasant parts of life. Like when we become subjects to our own feelings of powerlessness. When life seems a bit out of our own control, or we are subjected to the judgement of others before we have a say in things. The principalities and powers that most of us face are hardly as terrifying as what it must have been like in the first century of Jerusalem. At least here we have many freedoms. And, to add to those principalities and powers of Jesus’ time, there was a social system called “patron-client.” This system meant that if someone did a favor for you, then you are beholden to them always as a client to their patronage. The goal is to collect clients of your own by doing others favors. It was a hierarchy in which people were bound to others based on what they did for them.

People were subjects in the empire and they were subject to the rulers of that empire. We find ourselves subjected to many things that beg for our attention and for control all of the time. And while we must all abide by certain responsibilities of this life, we are charged to know and live by a very different kind of kingdom, one not of this world but planted here to redeem this world.

What better way to illustrate the roles and responsibilities of God’s loyal subjects than a place where everyone is involved in cultivating the land for a landowner?

Unlike most landowners who are concerned with the furtherance of their own businesses, God’s interest is in planting seeds of grace. We can see this is in the parable for, it shows us that God honors the latecomers as much as the early birds. Even though some of those early birds complain that the wages are unfair, God’s idea of justice is a much deeper one. It is similar to the kind of love a parent has for each child, no matter who is the first born.

And, there is one other observation I would like to share about this parable. It is something to which we can all relate. I remember listening to a friend who grew up in New Mexico and would travel with his brothers harvesting crops for farmers. They would work day and night to pick the crops. It was urgent! You had to gather as much as you can before it rots. So, the latecomers ARE just as valuable as the early birds. They are necessary!

So, whether you’re a latecomer or an early bird, has God got a job for you! But remember that the wages are the same for everyone. And, whether you’re an early bird or a latecomer to God’s garden, what matters most is that you are here at all. Amen.

**THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**Reopening the Church:** Your Session adopted a gradual approach to reopening the Fellowship Hall. Please note that we will open first to exercise classes, small group meals and other church-sanctioned small groups. These are open only to church members and attendees at this time. We still will not: accept Rummage donations, have Sunday potlucks, nor host the quilters. We will revisit those issues again at our next meeting.

**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.

**Rummage Sale Donations:**  If you desperately need to make a donation to the church for the next Rummage Sale, please ask Marge McKenzie if we have room in our storage space off-site.

**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.