**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 8, 2019, Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**RH 15 Sing Praise to God Who Reigns Above Marjorie McKenzie, Accompanist**

**BH 275 God of our Life**

**RH 383 I Love to Tell the Story**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

We lift your name on high, O Lord.

We praise you, for you are wonderful.

You keep your covenant with us.

You provide us with this Creation to enjoy and to care for.

You created your Church for us to gather and grow

You provide us fellowship and draw us together by your Holy Spirit.

You open our eyes to greater things than we normally can see for ourselves.

And so we give you our praise and thanks.

May our hearts be refreshed today by your holy word during this holy hour

That we may journey forth as new creations,

Proclaimers of your grace! 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 139:1-6, 13-18 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Let us pray to God saying:  
God of Welcome and Wonder, **help us draw the welcome circle wider.**

Triune God,  
you are the Creator, who has brought all life into being.  
With nothing but a word, you stirred the whirling planets.  
You brought life to the fish of the sea and the birds of the air.  
You called to your family people of different colors, races, and creeds.  
Help us to value the perspective of people different than us.  
God of Welcome and Wonder, **help us draw the welcome circle wider.**

Triune God,  
you are the Redeemer, who has renewed all of creation.  
With nothing but a body, you walked this earth and changed our lives.  
You brought freedom to the enslaved and salvation to the oppressed.  
You called to your family people of different colors, races, and creeds.  
Help us to welcome the truth that ALL people are worthy of love.  
God of Welcome and Wonder, **help us draw the welcome circle wider.**

Triune God,  
you are the Sustainer, who brings all of us together.  
With nothing but a wind, you brought us all together.  
You brought unity to those who were divided by society  
You called to your family people of different passions, gifts, and voices.  
Help us spread the news of your gospel that all might be invited to its abundance.  
God of Welcome and Wonder, **help us draw the welcome circle wider.**

Triune God,  
help us care for those who are in need:  
for those who are alone this day,  
for those who lack the resources to care for their family,  
for those who see no way out of the graves that surround them,  
for those who want nothing more than a word of welcome,  
and for those who need the gospel to sustain them for the coming week.  
Help us care for those who we lift up to you now aloud or in silence…  
God of Welcome and Wonder, **help us draw the welcome circle wider.**

Triune God,  
hear our prayer this day  
and provide for us our daily manna  
that we might continue to serve you faithfully.  
This we pray in the name of Jesus, who taught us to pray, saying: **Our Father…**

**Time Out For Teaching: Get to Know Philemon**

Today we have the rare chance to read an entire book of the Bible in one day. Don’t worry. It is the shortest book in the New Testament, so short that it doesn’t even have chapters. Just 22 verses make up Paul’s letter to Philemon. Some people pronounce the name Phil-e-mon with the emphasis on the first syllable and that’s probably closer to the Greek. Others, like me, have become stuck on pronouncing it Phil-e’-mon, with the accent on the second syllable.

Why does this book matter so much? It is the only personal letter we have by Paul. All of the others we have were written to churches, where congregations were the actual audience. It is written to a man named Philemon, and it also addresses alongside Philemon his wife, his family and other members of the household.

So, here is the backstory. Philemon was the head of the household. He and his family appear to have been evangelized by Paul at some point in time, and he probably even stayed with them. So, at the point that he wrote this letter to them, they had apparently a rather familiar relationship. Philemon’s family had converted to the Christian faith.

And so…But like lots of Paul’s letters, this letter has a very specific occasion and purpose. It’s not just about greeting them and catching them up on his life. What has happened is a member of Philemon’s household has run away, his slave Onesimus, and Onesimus has come to Paul, possibly while Paul was in prison.

This letter is Paul’s attempt to return Onesimus to Philemon and to present him as “more than a slave.” He writes to Philemon in order to persuade Philemon to take him back into his household, but indicates that Onesimus is somehow a changed man.

What might have happened to Onesimus on his time running away? What could have changed him there? Do you think that Paul has a persuasive argument? Listen carefully when I read the story to you in a little bit here. How did Paul present Onesimus to his owner? Would Onesimus have had any sort of remorse?

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Gospel Luke 14:25-33**

25Now large crowds were traveling with him; and he turned and said to them, 26"Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple. 27Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not first sit down and estimate the cost, to see whether he has enough to complete it? 29Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it will begin to ridicule him, 30saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31Or what king, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to oppose the one who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for the terms of peace. 33So therefore, none of you can become my disciple if you do not give up all your possessions.

**Philemon 1-21**

1Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother,

To Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, 2to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house:

3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4When I remember you in my prayers, I always thank my God 5because I hear of your love for all the saints and your faith toward the Lord Jesus. 6I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective when you perceive all the good that we may do for Christ. 7I have indeed received much joy and encouragement from your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, my brother.

8For this reason, though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do your duty, 9yet I would rather appeal to you on the basis of love-and I, Paul, do this as an old man, and now also as a prisoner of Christ Jesus. 10I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment. 11Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful both to you and to me. 12I am sending him, that is, my own heart, back to you. 13I wanted to keep him with me, so that he might be of service to me in your place during my imprisonment for the gospel; 14but I preferred to do nothing without your consent, in order that your good deed might be voluntary and not something forced. 15Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back forever, 16no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother-especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.

17So if you consider me your partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. 18If he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. 19I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand: I will repay it. I say nothing about your owing me even your own self. 20Yes, brother, let me have this benefit from you in the Lord! Refresh my heart in Christ. 21Confident of your obedience, I am writing to you, knowing that you will do even more than I say.

**Sermon: Dear Brother Paul…**

Dear Brother Paul,

Greetings from the house-church of Philemon and from all the family. I thank God every day for fathering my faith when I was a sinner, a runaway and a violator of this empire’s laws. When I found you in prison, on the run from our brother Philemon, I was in a terrible state. I had become angry with my master’s treatment of me. I didn’t understand the faith he had adopted and had expected much more from his behavior, that it would reflect his new belief in Jesus the Messiah. I had also resented the fact that we all had to be baptized, just because I was a slave in the household.

I never did thank you personally, nor provide you with news as to what happened once you sent me back to my brother Philemon. You remember how anxious I was about how he would receive me home. It was the confidence I had in the Lord, persuaded by you that I was doing the right thing, and it was boosted by the knowledge of what you had written in your letter to him, which gave me hope. But it wasn’t until I returned home with your letter and spoke to Philemon that I would know whether he would receive me back and forgive me.

When I arrived, your letter in my hand, Philemon glared at me with anger but also with relief to see me back. I felt my face hot with embarrassment for running away from him, and facing him in that moment, I felt nervous that I might run away from him again. I handed him the letter, my face drooping down, and I waited for him to read it. I was afraid that he might send me to prison. A runaway slave is like stolen property in the eyes of the law. This is true in the eyes of Imperial Rome, but also in the eyes of the Lord. You taught me that, Brother.

So, knowing that I had wronged Philemon, not just as a citizen of the Empire, but because I had wronged a fellow brother in the Lord, I did just what you told me. I stood before my brother and confessed my sin to him.

What was remarkable about your letter was that you gave Philemon the freedom to choose based on love. You allowed him the opportunity to decide for himself. You also provided him the assurance that I was a changed person, because I had finally begun to grasp the meaning of God’s forgiveness and trying to do the right thing. I believe your letter persuaded Philemon to see me as a full human who had much more to offer than I did as his slave. He understood that I am now more useful than ever to this world in need of hope. I can do God’s work of reconciliation now, as difficult as it can be. Now Philemon is my brother, not my master.

You were right, brother Paul. I had to face him and tell him I was truly sorry before he could forgive me. And it was the most frightening thing I ever did. But he honored that. He did it for me and as a way of honoring you. Above all, his forgiveness to me was a way of honoring God.

So, thank you, Brother Paul. You have taught me that I should face the consequences of my actions. I should seek the forgiveness of the Lord, but not only that – I have to seek the forgiveness of anyone I have hurt. The Lord’s forgiveness is just a part of God’s work to save us all. The other part is seeking the forgiveness of each other. And because Philemon welcomed me back into the household, I have become a full participant in the church. I finally came to Jesus on my own, not just because I was forced to as a slave in the house. I am eagerly learning as much as I can now in catechesis and am thinking of doing the kind of work that you do, writing letters of encouragement to others.

Your letter saved me, Brother Paul. And for that, I will always be grateful. I now see that true reconciliation – with God and with each other – is the Lord’s work and anyone can do it. I promise to do it for the rest of my life. I shall pray for you and your work, as I know you are praying for ours here. And may all the world begin to see and understand that reconciliation is what brings peace and relief to all our hearts. Sincerely, Onesimus.

**Announcements:**

**Green Chile Gals meets tomorrow after work.** Ladies, drop by Fellowship Hall for a little fellowship and food. 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. Did you know that those who volunteer their time get “first dibs” on purchases? The Sale is October 4-5 from 9AM-3PM.