**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**April 18, 2021 3rd Sunday in Easter 11:00 a.m.**

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

RH 144 I Greet Thee, Who My Sure Redeemer Art

BH 105 Because You Live, O Christ

RH 399 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

**Call to Worship**

We are witnesses,
**to the love God has poured into us.**
We are witnesses of God’s love,
**sharing it with each person we meet.**
We are witnesses to everyone we encounter,
**little children like us, sisters and brothers in God’s family.**

**Opening Prayer**

Open our hearts to your power and presence today, O Jesus. Even though we have done much to put distance between ourselves and you, come to us today, Risen Christ. So that, in our worship and our lives lived, we declare as Resurrection People, that in you there is repentance and forgiveness from sins, from here to the ends of the earth. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

We know how easy it is to trick ourselves into believing that every thought is pure, every act is just, every choice is correct. But if we want to be God’s children, to grow in hope, to walk in the Light, we must admit our mistakes, so we may open ourselves to the healing mercy of God’s love.  Join me, please, as we pray together, saying,

**Prayer of Confession**

Emptier of tombs, we find ourselves running down the street after lies, rather than walking with you. We find it easy to love other people, as long as they don’t annoy or bother us. We hunger for love and search for affirmation, yet find it difficult to let others love us for who we are. Forgive us, Compassionate Heart. You listen to the whispers of our hearts, and then sing of the promises of hope. You grace us with peace, so our hearts can rest in you. You continue to transform us into Easter people, brothers and sisters of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. ~silence~ **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Not everything has been revealed to us, but this we do know: as God’s children, we are blessed, we are loved, we are forgiven.
**Our lives have been transformed by the abundant mercy given to us in Christ Jesus our Lord. Thanks be to God! Amen**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**\*Gloria Patri**

 **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen, Amen.**

**Psalm 4:1-8**

Answer me when I call, O God of my right!
You gave me room when I was in distress.
**Be gracious to me, and hear my prayer.**

How long, you people, shall my honor suffer shame?
How long will you love vain words, and seek after lies?
**But know that the LORD has set apart the faithful for himself;
the LORD hears when I call to him.**

When you are disturbed, do not sin;
ponder it on your beds, and be silent.
**Offer right sacrifices,
and put your trust in the LORD.**

There are many who say, “O that we might see some good!
Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!”
**You have put gladness in my heart
more than when their grain and wine abound.**

I will both lie down and sleep in peace;
**for you alone, O LORD, make me lie down in safety.**

**Prayers of the People**

Hear us, O God, when we call upon you!
Your love sets us free from the power of death;
your mercy frees us from doubt and fear;
your promise frees us to serve you alone.
You do wonders for your people, O Lord:
hear our prayers as we call out to you.
Guard those who face anger, fear, or trouble;
keep your people from sin, and reconcile our hearts.
Protect all who seek and serve you,
and bless those who give their lives to your mission.
Turn your face toward those who long for better times,
who long to see your light once again.
For all who suffer and sorrow, let there be gladness overflowing.
We put our trust in you, O Lord,
for your promises alone are sure.
We pray in the name of the risen Christ, saying together:
The Lord’s Prayer

**Offering**

**Time out for Teaching: Terrified and Overjoyed**

Jesus was lost and found. Or I guess you could say he lost himself in order to find us. He died and then rose from the dead, appearing to his disciples, both women and men.

He appeared many different times, we are told at the beginning of Acts, leading up to the day of His Ascension. He spent a good deal of time with his disciples, teaching them and breaking bread with them.

But at first, we see his appearance to the disciples evokes terror and joy in their hearts simultaneously. Luke’s gospel story today tells us that they were terrified, for they thought he was a ghost. Last Sunday, in John’s version, we are told they rejoiced when they could see the wounds in his hands and side. In some Resurrection appearance stories, we see that they are both terrified and overjoyed at the same time.

I think that this mixture of feelings must have been normal for them. It is remarkable that the human spirit, when we encounter a sacred moment such as this, coming out of losing someone so precious as Jesus, that we can have such a wide range of reactions. Terrified and Overjoyed. On a normal day, this would seem rather impossible to feel all of those things.

But they thought they were seeing his ghost. And they were overjoyed to see him again. And as the reality dawned on them that he was a physical presence, able to eat fish and break bread with them, I am sure the terror had begun to subside and the joy overtook them.

What does the news of the resurrection do to you? Is it scary? Is it joyful? Is it both? Can you identify with those disciples at all?

**Prayer for Illumination**

Risen Christ,
you opened the scriptures to your disciples
and made their hearts burn within them.
Open our eyes, our ears, and our hearts,
so we might recognize you once again
in these words of scripture,
by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

**Acts 3:12-19**

12When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? 13The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. 14But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, 15and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. 16And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

17“And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. 18In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. 19Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

**Gospel Luke 24:36b-48**

Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.” 37They were startled and terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. 38He said to them, “Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? 39Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have.” 40And when he had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. 41While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, he said to them, “Have you anything here to eat?” 42They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43and he took it and ate in their presence.

44Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled.” 45Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, 46and he said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, 47and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. 48You are witnesses of these things.”

**Sermon “Back in the Picture” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

St. Patrick’s Day in Boston, 1990. Thirteen treasures were stolen from the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Among them were priceless works of art by Rembrandt, Manet, Degas and others. The art in total is valued right at about 500 million dollars. How they did it was two people dressed like police officers – on St. Patrick’s Day, when half the city is out partying in the streets – come to the museum security claiming they had heard there was a disturbance on the property. After subduing the night security guard, they spend 81 minutes in the museum’s galleries, removing valuable pieces of art by cutting them out of the frames. Nearly 30 years hence, the art is still missing. There are many theories about whether it was mafia-related, whether the art was somewhere overseas or being stored out of sight. Why would someone steal it was also in question, for it was far too famous to sell.

Today, those beautiful, gilded, carved frames hang in the museum in Boston, empty still. You can see the wallpaper behind them. The frames wait for the art to be returned. The museum continues to hold out hope, offering a 10 million dollar reward to whomever can lead investigators to the art. After 30 years, you might think that they would like to just let go and move on. Seems like a cold case. But it’s been far too long now.

Those empty frames remind me of how we too hang on to whatever persons or things we greatly value. A former life that seems better than this one. Or to those we love who have already moved on. Are those empty frames a sign of hope? Or maybe a sign of what evil and suffering is capable of doing? The frames for the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum are witnesses to both. And they may be seen as a refusal to stop hoping for that which cannot be replaced by anything; not even money can satisfy their loss.

For the disciples just a few days after Jesus’ crucifixion, they held nothing but an empty frame, having lost their dear Jesus. Friend, teacher, miracle worker. Through their friendship with Him, they had come to know the Lord better than they had ever known before. They learned that God truly worked here. They learned that God truly cared about them. But they did not expect to see Him appear. Even though He had predicted multiple times before His death that the Son of Man would rise again in three days, it’s not like any of them could truly understand what they would mean. When they heard him say it before, they barely could wrap their minds around that prediction. They had never seen anything like it. And now that the one who had been the center of their lives for so long, who may have been distant cousins to some of them, has appeared to them again, after He truly had died, they were terrified and joyful at the same time. They lost the most irreplaceable, invaluable thing in the whole wide world and now that priceless gift of Jesus Christ now had returned to them. And in a way, after his death and resurrection, Jesus had become even more valuable to us all. Having shown He is God in the Flesh, able to beat death itself, done it for our own salvation, his value to us all is now sky-high. Greater than a Rembrandt, no question about it.

For now, as our Scriptures say, “We have beheld his glory.” Now, there have been witnesses to Jesus’ power and grace. There have been many witnesses. Witnesses who were both terrified and joyful upon realizing that Jesus was truly with them. And now, with them forever.

In our story today, Luke sums up a lot of different aspects of the Resurrection in a classic apology. An “apology” was a philosophical word used to describe a written approach to debunking ideas. “Apology” in Greek means “defense.” Here, we see that apology, to defend the faith in the Resurrection. For many have been trying to debunk the Resurrection, as long as Christianity has been around. For anyone who cannot believe it, has to have their reasons. The theory that he was really just a ghost, not a bodily resurrection, for instance. But here, Resurrected Jesus ate fish! You could touch him and feel that he was a solid body, not just a spirit. The crucifixion itself is proof, for it ensured that Jesus truly died, it wasn’t a theatrical trick, nor a stunt double. The empty tomb with the stone too large for a solitary human to roll away, that Joseph of Arimathea had helped move his body to a tomb for later burial, let us know that it wasn’t a case of body snatching either. Luke offers up several different ways for us to understand that the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus were both physical and not just folklore.

Our gospel writers work so hard at showing us, not just telling us, that the Resurrection was a bodily one, it was complete and it was real. There were many witnesses, even more than those who saw the greatest art heist in modern history. And there is a reason why there needed to be so many witnesses. For now there is work to do. Jesus says so. “repentance and forgiveness of sins must be proclaimed to all the nations, beginning with Jerusalem.” Now, maybe he said that just because Jerusalem is a holy city. I think it was because that’s where Jesus’ disciples were to begin, because repentance and forgiveness of sins begins with wherever we are, wherever God has already planted us. Our own hearts, our homes, our immediate surroundings. It begins with us from inside of us. For now, we can know that the Resurrected Jesus is back in the picture, and will be so forevermore. Now, let’s live it too. Amen.

**\*Benediction**