**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

## Sunday, March 26, 2017, the Fourth Sunday in Lent

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

**Prayer of the Day**

You, O God are our eternal hope.

Where there is no hope in us, yours abides.

When we fail in love, yours abides.

When we cry for help in our unbelief, your faithfulness abides.

Abide with us today, O Christ,

Strengthening us by your signs of the Resurrection.

In your holy presence we pray,

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 130**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

**Lord, hear my voice!**

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities,

**Lord, who could stand?**

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

**I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;**

my soul waits for the Lord

**more than those who watch for the morning,**

**more than those who watch for the morning.**

O Israel, hope in the LORD!

**For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.**

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Time Out for Teaching: Language of Lent - Redemption**

What does redemption mean to you? When the UConn women’s basketball team lost this week to Mississippi State, I became sure that they will be back – for redemption of their title. Redemption has become a popular word nowadays to describe something we are seeking. We want redemption. But that’s a slight bit different from the redemption that we are offered in Jesus Christ.

Redemption is a way of bringing back someone who has been somehow enslaved, in exile, and doing it by paying a price. It is less like the way it’s used in sports and actually closer in meaning to when we take our coupon to the Subway for our free drink with a six inch sub and we redeem it.

Redemption is about paying the value of something so we can get it back. Jesus does that for us. We do not have time today to get into the different theologies of this redemption. There are several. Maybe after Easter we can work that into some sermons. The oldest and simplest is just the idea of Jesus’ blood sacrifice to redeem us from our sins. The Lamb of God who paid the price for us. How God does it is not as important to us today as is God’s power to do it. The Psalmist said, “It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities…” God holds great power to redeem. We can be confident of this because God loves us so. How he does it is less important to us as is knowing He can do it.

**John 11:1-15, 17-29, 32-45**

1Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. 2Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. 3So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” 4But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” 5Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

7Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” 8The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” 9Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. 10But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” 11After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” 12The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” 13Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. 14Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. 15For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

17When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. 18Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, 19and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. 20When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21Martha said to Jesus, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.” 23Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” 24Martha said to him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” 27She said to him, “Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.”

28When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, “The Teacher is here and is calling for you.” 29And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.

32When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” 33When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” 35Jesus began to weep. 36So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” 37But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

38Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” 40Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” 41So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” 43When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” 44The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

45Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

**Ezekiel 37:1-14**

1The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. 2He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. 3He said to me, “Mortal, can these bones live?” I answered, “O Lord GOD, you know.” 4Then he said to me, “Prophesy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. 5Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. 6I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the LORD.”

7So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. 8I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them. 9Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live.” 10I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

11Then he said to me, “Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ 12Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act,” says the LORD.

**Sermon: “Great Power to Redeem”**

I bet you a hundred dollars that everyone here today at some time has felt hopeless. You learn your spouse is terminally ill. You learn you will never be allowed to drive again. A friendship is over. You have lost your life savings. These are just a few things that have made others feel hopeless. Hopelessness also might be called despair. For there is a temptation in hopelessness to give up. Maybe let go of our lifelines, or give up on prayer. Hopelessness knows no creed, no color, no financial status. Hopelessness can strike anyone.

Hopelessness isn’t exactly the same as lacking faith, although they are connected. The Apostle Paul once wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, “these three remain, faith, hope and love.” Hope can strengthen faith in God and vice versa. Our assurance of God’s love can strengthen faith and hope. Faith, Hope and Love work together.

God, out of his great and creative love, heard the pain of the Israelites as they languished in Babylon. They said, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.’ Ezekiel was one of their leaders, a Temple priest. He, along with his people, witnessed the destruction of the Temple when the Babylonians invaded Jerusalem in 587 BC. No wonder they felt cut off from God. For the Temple WAS their hope, peace of mind, source of forgiveness. It was where they could find God when they couldn’t find Him anywhere else. It was for them the intersection of heaven and earth, where God had chosen to touch earth with His holy presence.

God shows Ezekiel that hope is not lost. Hope isn’t just a nice idea. With God there is hope that one day redemption shall take flesh and bone. Hope shall be lived, not just talked about. This vision God gives Ezekiel is a message of God’s raw power to redeem, to create something from absolutely nothing. It might make you think back to the creation story, except this story is even more graphic and radical – God’s love for His people is so powerful that it can cross over state lines to a foreign nation to ransom and recreate a whole nation, when it looks like nothing is possible.

It’s a little like the raising of Lazarus, except what Jesus does with Lazarus is just bring him back to life – no easy feat, mind you – but it’s just one man. The raising of Jesus, however, may be more like Ezekiel’s story because with the raising of Jesus the whole world can have hope, the whole world may see the impossible possibility. The whole world may look to the Day of Resurrection see hope for a bodily redemption.

Last Sunday I told you God can do things never seen before! And today we see two stories where God demonstrates great power to redeem and rebuild. **What** do you think of that?

There are no easy answers for the individual who has fallen into despair. The Good News is that we may find, in time, if we can stick it out, God’s mercies were carrying us through. No form of suffering lasts forever, even though it feels like forever.

Let me tell you a story. On the TV series Brain Games, a show about how our brains can fool us into seeing things. They did an experiment. They invited people who are attending a rodeo to participate in a photo shoot with their favorite rodeo star. Each group of fans had a series of photos taken. They were shown all the photos, flashed on a computer for 1 second! But as they enjoy viewing the pictures, 1 second each, to their surprise, one of the photos is a gorilla! Everyone thought the gorilla picture lasted much longer than 1 second! But it was shown just the same as the others. The experiment proves that our brains, when caught off guard by something unpleasant, think it is much longer than those pleasanter times.

Maybe this is how it feels with no hope. It feels like it is going on forever! From God’s point of view, the time is the same, and so is his promise: “I have spoken and I will act.” So what shall we do while we wait? First: Don’t cut off your lifeline. Strengthen it. Strengthen your prayer life, even if your prayer sounds as desperate as Mary and Martha’s – “Lord if you had been here, our brother would not have died…” God can take our criticism. He has taken a lot worse. Second: You have each other. Turn to each other and smile. Church is your lifeline. It’s one of the reasons Jesus created the Church. And third: don’t forget, Faith, Hope and Love. They are inseparable and can work together for good. See, Friends? When you think that hope is lost, just realize God has already given us the tools we need, to be assured of his power to redeem. Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Holy Communion**

Friends, this table is not Presbyterian, not Methodist, not Catholic. It is the place where we can meet Jesus. It is now the place where Heaven and Earth join together and by God’s Holy Spirit we find faith, hope and love. In this holy meal, comprised of the simple elements of wheat and grapes, we find strength for the journey. Let this place be your reminder that Jesus travels with you wherever you go from here. All who seek him are invited to this holy meal.

Let us pray:

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them unto the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right to give our thanks and praise.

It is truly right to give you our thanks and praise, Almighty God, Creator of the Universe.

You made us in your image, to care for your creation,

And even when we disobey, you continue to call us into your service.

When we ignored your prophets’ calls to purity,

It was out of your great love for us

That you made another promise –

That you would one day come to us in the flesh to dwell among us,

To be our Savior, our Light to the Nations, our Redeemer.

Therefore, we join our voices with the choirs of angels and saints from every time and place, singing,

Holy, holy holy Lord.

God of power and might.

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the Highest, Hosanna in the highest!

Today we seek you –

That you shall become for us bread for the journey,

Manna in the wilderness of our lives.

Be for us the strength by which we live,

A constant reminder of redemption long-hoped for.

Keep us on your path this Lenten season,

Direct our minds to the joy of your Resurrection Day.

In our prayers today we also hold before you:

Be present to us in the breaking of this bread and the pouring of this cup. In the name of Jesus the Christ who taught his disciples to pray: “Our Father, who art in heaven…Amen.”

**Words of Institution**

**Distribution of Elements**

**Prayer after Communion**

Lord, you have come near to us in the bread and juice,

Feeding us with the reminders of your extraordinary gifts of creation

And the strength that comes with a simple meal.

Gird our spirits with your Spirit,

That in all our days encountering this world to which you have sent us to serve,

Our spirits never fail and our hope never falters.

Prepare us for your day of Resurrection,

With hope made certain by your undying Love.

Through Jesus Christ we live. Amen.

**Announcements:**

We continue our journey through the Gospel of Mark this Friday at 5:30PM in the Fellowship Hall. Warm bread and wholesome, homemade soup is for dinner!

Make plans to come to a Maundy Thursday service on Thursday, April 13th. There will be a service of communion by intinction, as we did last year.

Calling all musicians! Amy is looking for a couple of voices or bell ringers to play special music on Easter Sunday. We will be creative this year, as the illustrious Nancy Mueller is out of town for Easter this year.