**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, January 22, 2017, 3rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Call to Worship**

We who sit in darkness-

**Have seen a great light!**

For those who dwell in the shadow of death,

**Light dawns!**

Let us rejoice and praise God,

**For the Kingdom of Heaven is near!**

**Prayer of the Day**

Light of the World,

Dawn in our hearts today.

Illumine our minds with your presence.

That as we worship, we find your truths

We discover something new to bring into our lives.

You are the Word made Flesh and the Word made Fresh,

In the name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession**

**Holy and Beloved God, it is hard to hope when all seems lost. The darkness has a way of fuzzing our vision, of taking our eyes off of your holy light. It’s hardest to see your light when our eyes are shut – shut to you, shut to each other, and shut to the suffering that is just barely disguised by thin smiles and haunted eyes. Yet, your light shines. Your hope abides with us, awakening us to your love, and calling us to share your light with each other. Help us make room for you in our hearts, that your love might open our eyes to your presence in the world.** ~silence~ **Amen.**

**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 27:1, 4-9**

The LORD is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

**One thing I asked of the LORD,
that will I seek after:
to live in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to behold the beauty of the LORD,
and to inquire in his temple.**

For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will set me high on a rock.

**Now my head is lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the LORD.**

Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud,
be gracious to me and answer me!
**“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!”
Your face, LORD, do I seek.**Do not hide your face from me.

Do not turn your servant away in anger,

you who have been my help.
**Do not cast me off, do not forsake me,
O God of my salvation!**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord of Life,

You modeled for us a life of righteousness that was marked from the start with your very own baptism. You were without sin when you were washed in the Jordan, but emerged to officially begin your life of ministry, and died on our behalf, bearing the weight of the world.

Thank you for your leading us. Thank you for dying so that we might live to you.

Today we pray for the needs of others and for ourselves.

We thank you for bringing Matt home safely the long distance from Louisiana through bad weather and hardship.

We thank you for the moisture which continues to melt slowly into the earth and pray that you continue to shower your earth – for the sake of farmers, ranchers, our water table and allergy-sufferers.

We pray for many others who are traveling, possibly made late because of the recent snow.

We pray for the needs of the world, torn asunder by political differences, by violent conflict, by fear.

We pray for the Middle East, for North and South Korea, for Russia and China. For our own nation and rising new leadership.

We pray for the situation in Poland.

God remind us of your strong and powerful hand, by which we are held. For it is in you that we live and move and have our being.

Now in silence we lift up our personal prayers to you.

You are the one who brings new life, gives meaning and substance to our lives, lifts our minds to the loftiest of thoughts and ideals. You give us purpose to look beyond ourselves and our own limitations. You alone are God, and in humility and simplicity we pray as your disciples were taught saying, “Our Father, who art in heaven…Amen.”

**Time Out for Teaching: The Properties of Light**

Light is a common theme throughout our lectionary texts this morning.

This morning’s psalm calls God “my light and my salvation.”

Light appears again in Isaiah and this is quoted in the gospel reading: “The people who dwelled in darkness have seen a great light…”

If you simply did a word search of the entire Bible, the word “light” – as in a light that shines (not the other usages of the word) appears at least 200 times.

Obviously it’s important.

Light is a symbol of what God does.

So let’s survey the congregation right now and remind ourselves of what light is and does. Anyone want to go first?

In Genesis, light is the first thing God creates, calls good, and light becomes the thing that brings all other things from chaos to order.

In Exodus 10, the 9th plague was darkness, and it says that everyone dwelled in darkness for 3 days, except for the Israelites, who had light. This darkness comes upon the land by God’s command to Moses who spreads his arm out. God’s command says, “Let there be darkness upon the land, a darkness that can be felt.” That darkness is the thing that makes the Pharaoh tell Moses to take his people and go, along with the livestock and supplies, so they can leave and worship their own God. But then the Pharoah still does not let them go, not until after the 10th plague, the Passover.

Other places when light appears: In the pillar of smoke and fire, God leads the Israelites to safety, that pillar gives them light at night.

Light-ning and smoke signals to the Israelites that God is near.

Light and lamps are a very important accoutrement in the building of the Temple.

“Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.”

Light of wisdom – about what?

Light of revealing – what?

Light of comfort… - how?

**Isaiah 9:1-4**

1But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former times he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.
2   The people who walked in darkness
          have seen a great light;
     those who lived in a land of deep darkness —
          on them light has shined.
3   You have multiplied the nation,
          you have increased its joy;
     they rejoice before you
          as with joy at the harvest,
          as people exult when dividing plunder.
4   For the yoke of their burden,
          and the bar across their shoulders,
          the rod of their oppressor,
          you have broken as on the day of Midian.

**Matthew 4:12-23**

12Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. 13He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled:
15  “Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,
          on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles —
16  the people who sat in darkness
          have seen a great light,
     and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death
          light has dawned.”
17From that time Jesus began to proclaim, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

18As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea — for they were fishermen. 19And he said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.” 20Immediately they left their nets and followed him. 21As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. 22Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him.

23Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

**1 Corinthians 1:10-18**

10Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. 11For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters. 12What I mean is that each of you says, “I belong to Paul,” or “I belong to Apollos,” or “I belong to Cephas,” or “I belong to Christ.” 13Has Christ been divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? 14I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15so that no one can say that you were baptized in my name. 16(I did baptize also the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized anyone else.) 17For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power.

18For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

**Sermon: The Brains of the Outfit**

I changed the sermon title, and called it “The Brains of the Outfit.” Paul is worried that the church in Corinth has forgotten who is truly head of the Body of Christ. It is not Paul, nor Peter, nor Apollos, nor any other evangelist. Jesus is the brains of the outfit. You might feel like Paul sounds a bit confrontational. Perhaps it was to shake them up, grab their attention, because they needed an intervention. The Corinthians had become de-centered, divided.

Division is one of the main problems they faced. As you just heard, they are claiming allegiances to various teachers who baptized them. Some were saying, “I belong to Paul,” some “I belong to Cephas,” and “I belong to Apollos.” But Paul is reminding them that this is not accurate. It’s important that they get this right: they all belong to Jesus.

To be fair to those blessed Corinthians, it wasn’t a new idea to claim allegiance to your teacher. Teachers in the ancient world were often seen as endowed with holy wisdom. The early rabbis used to say, “Through the student a teacher lives forever.” But by holding onto their allegiance to their different teachers, the Corinthians seemed to forget the One in whose name these teachers came to them.

You and I are also so blessed to have known some great teachers – people who passed along to us valuable lessons about faith and life. They shed light on our lives in a way that we feel obligated to honor them, and because of this, attribute to them a certain degree of glory. Maybe for you it was a favorite pastor. Or an Elder for whom you will always be grateful. Maybe that person had a special saying that will always stick in your mind and to help you through life. These people are God’s gifts to us. But sometimes what can happen is we get stuck, giving them a bit too much glory, idolizing them, allowing their teachings to supersede all our decisions together in community. And if the lessons we bring lead us to division instead of unity, that can hurt our fellowship. That can damage the message of grace.

This is where Paul saw the Corinthian church heading. That by claiming the name of the one who baptized them, they were divided. This division was a factor in their other dysfunctions. By putting too much emphasis on their beloved teachers, they were forgetting who is truly and always the brains of the outfit.

From this passage unfolds what many believe is one of Paul’s seminal works. A letter about how to love one another and abide together as a community of faith. 1st Corinthians tells us that in Jesus united we stand. It is much later in this letter Paul reminds the church that they are a part of God’s building up His kingdom. It doesn’t come through as clearly in English as it does in the Greek that this is a building project. He tells the Corinthians to be “subject” to one another. The Greek word he uses is not about domination, but architecture. Being subject to one another “ordering” ourselves in relationship to each other, with Jesus at the top. He is keystone that holds the whole thing up. If you’ve ever been to Pennsylvania (the Keystone State), you see a lot of old stone bridges. If you’ve ever looked at the way the arches fit together – stacked one on top of another, leaning on each other, giving mutual support to the whole structure. The thing that keeps them all together is a keystone.

Jesus is our keystone. Paul is not telling the Corinthians to forget everything they have learned from their teachers. He wants the Corinthians to do is to grow up, and see beyond their teachers, that they are all a part of a much larger structure. So they can lean in on one another more, as they lean on Jesus Christ, rather than allowing the building to crumble.

This is good news for us all, my friends, for we live in an age where the world is divided – politically, ethically, generationally. When some of us have access to the world through the information superhighway and others don’t even have a computer. Some read the Bible a certain way and others differently. I am grateful that in Christ’s church, we may have that diversity, but we don’t have to be divided.

This is one reason why we pray before and after session meetings, for Jesus to be our conscience. It’s why when our congregation reaches a decision, like electing new leaders, we don’t jump around and cheer, for there may be a minority who disagree. We have to lean on Jesus as we grow and learn to love and trust each other.

There is a point in our journey of faith, when we’ve got to let go of our idols and begin to see the larger picture of God’s church. In whose name are you living your faith? Is it your dad’s or mom’s? Is it your college professor’s? Is it in your own name, if you consider yourself a self-made believer? Make Jesus your mind and heart. He’s the brains of this outfit. And it’s not easy. And we will look like fools to those who don’t understand. But God is the one we are here to please. Amen.

**Announcements:**

The Congregational Meeting will take place on Sunday, February 5thafter worship. An Agenda and an Annual Report are forthcoming.