**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, January 8, 2017, Baptism of our Lord**

**Hymns:**

**Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me RH 404**

**O Jesus, I Have Promised RH 307**

**Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart RH 407**

**Call to Worship**

The voice of the LORD is powerful;   
**the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.**

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;   
**the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.**Here are your followers, mighty Lord.

**In us, may you be well-pleased.**

Let us listen to the voice of the Lord!

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord you are powerful and majestic.

Holy is your name.

We remember with humility our baptism

And the way you called us forth from the waters

Into your way of righteousness as your people.

Remind us of your great power

And today let us renew our bond to you

That your righteousness may flourish upon the earth.

In Christ our Redeemer we pray.

Amen.

**Call to Confession**

God’s promises are sure and God’s love is from everlasting to everlasting. But we often have trouble maintaining a constancy of faithfulness to him. In faith and penitence, let us approach the throne of grace first together and then in silence.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Faithful God, your promise is forever true, your care for us is sure. We confess that we have often believed we will have to take care of ourselves, forgetting your promise and your call. We look at the world, and we choose fear rather than hope and love. When it seems life is unraveling, we look for ways to defend ourselves and ensure our security and our desire, rather than following your way. Forgive us, Lord, and give us courage to hope—and to act on hope—in the face of fear. Amen.**~silence~

**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 29**

Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,   
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.   
**Ascribe to the LORD the glory of his name;   
worship the LORD in holy splendor.**

The voice of the LORD is over the waters;   
the God of glory thunders,   
the LORD, over mighty waters.   
**The voice of the LORD is powerful;   
the voice of the LORD is full of majesty.**

The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;   
the LORD breaks the cedars of Lebanon.   
**He makes Lebanon skip like a calf,   
and Sirion like a young wild ox.**

The voice of the LORD flashes forth flames of fire.   
The voice of the LORD shakes the wilderness;   
the LORD shakes the wilderness of Kadesh.

**The voice of the LORD causes the oaks to whirl,   
and strips the forest bare;   
and in his temple all say, “Glory!”**

The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;   
the LORD sits enthroned as king forever.   
**May the LORD give strength to his people!   
May the LORD bless his people with peace!**

**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 thank you for bringing to us the wide-eyed idealism of college students heading to serve your people on the Tec Nos Poos reservation.

We pray for those kids – who are now our kids – that they safely arrive at their destination.

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 those caught in this past week’s gun violence.

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 Celebration of Baptism**

Let me play a song for you… The song is a traditional spiritual – this recording is from the “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” soundtrack.

Why do I play it for you today?

What were the emotions you heard in this song?

What were the people going to do at the river? To pray.

They’d been “studying about the Good Lord…” Going to the river was their response to what they had learned about the Lord.

Calling others to the river “Let’s go down.”

Their prayer: “Good Lord, show me the way…”

So often we think about the sacrament (which means “mystery”) of baptism as when we are desperately in need – maybe filled with fear of the Lord – of cleansing of our sins.

But this hymn tells us that it is after studying what the Lord has said, a heartfelt response to what it means to be marked as God’s very own.

Baptism, and our other sacrament of communion are celebrations of what we know about hearing about the Lord’s message for us. It’s a personal response to His gracious love. And it’s a marking of sorts – an outward sign of an inward grace. Going to the river is a the next step from just knowing of that grace.

More about that in the sermon…

**Isaiah 42:1-9**

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
    my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him;  
    he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
**2**He will not cry or lift up his voice,  
    or make it heard in the street;  
**3**a bruised reed he will not break,  
    and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
    he will faithfully bring forth justice.  
**4**He will not grow faint or be crushed  
    until he has established justice in the earth;  
    and the coastlands wait for his teaching.

**5**Thus says God, the Lord,  
    who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
    who spread out the earth and what comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it  
    and spirit to those who walk in it:  
**6**I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness,  
    I have taken you by the hand and kept you;  
I have given you as a covenant to the people,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+42%3A1-9&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-18487a)]  
    a light to the nations,  
**7**    to open the eyes that are blind,  
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,  
    from the prison those who sit in darkness.  
**8**I am the Lord, that is my name;  
    my glory I give to no other,  
    nor my praise to idols.  
**9**See, the former things have come to pass,  
    and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth,  
    I tell you of them.

**Matthew 3:13-17**

**13**Then Jesus came from Galilee to John at the Jordan, to be baptized by him. **14**John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” **15**But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” Then he consented. **16**And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. **17**And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, the Beloved,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+3%3A13-17&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-23210a)] with whom I am well pleased.”

**Sermon: The Road to Righteousness**

Judy Hopps was the first rabbit to become a cop. She is the main character of the animated movie called “Zootopia.” She wanted to be a cop so she could make the world a better place. But when Judy joins the police force, she is the smallest one, alongside the rhinos, elephants and tigers. So they give her the job of meter maid.

She’s disappointed, but she doesn’t give up easily on her dream, when an otter goes missing. She hails the help of a sly, conniving fox, a confidence man of sorts. And they find the otter, discovering a whole host of other missing predatory animals, who have mysteriously gone savage!

If you haven’t seen the movie, don’t worry, for I haven’t given away the ending. For Officer Judy Hopps, this is just the beginning. She starts to have her doubts about the safety of Zootopia. She worries if their utopia –where predator and prey live together peaceably - might be threatened. And by voicing her concerns to the press, she hurts the feelings of her newfound friend the fox.

Finally she discovers a new clue that will bring the truth to light about those predators-turned-savage. But she needs her friend the fox more than ever, and returns to him, begging for forgiveness. And if not forgiveness, at least help her complete the investigation. Through contrite bunny tears, she begs, “I don’t care what you think of me – you can hate me the rest of your life. Just please help.” Her goal continues to be making the world a better place. She has a contrite heart: one that knows she doesn’t deserve forgiveness, yet needs help.

I know, it’s a Disney movie about talking animals but it is a message about forgiveness and working with others to do the right thing.

And that’s our calling too.

The Church is a place for sinners working together to do the right thing. A place, in other words, where the people of God walk together on the road to righteousness. A place for the baptized and those seeking baptism to forgive one another as God forgives us. Where we seek our calling, and consider what God wants us to do with the gifts God has given us. We make the world a better place by just doing that stuff, even if it’s piecemeal, bit by bit.

Our baptism marks us for salvation, and it is also a doorway to new life, where God uses us to make God’s world better.

This is what happens in today’s gospel reading. John the Baptist asks the question that is on our minds when Jesus comes to him, wanting to be baptized: “Wouldn’t it be proper that you baptize me?” Jesus’ answer clarifies it: “Let it be so now; for it is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness.” That makes sense. For it is in this moment Jesus begins his baptismal journey. Jesus’ baptism is the beginning of His ministry on earth, for it is from here that he is driven to the wilderness, then on to heal, to preach, to listen and teach, and then to die on our behalf, all a part of his journey of righteousness. But this baptism is not because Jesus needs more righteousness - for he is without sin - but the world needs HIS righteousness – it’s called “imputed righteousness.” It is because of Him that we are here, for His righteousness is fulfilled and now fills the world, bit by bit.

We have a new beginning in baptism. Every time we think on what our baptism represents, it’s a time to renew the call to walk the road to righteousness. It’s a journey that never quite ends. There’s always more to learn. Like Officer Judy Hopps, who thought she had arrived at the big time at the ZPD, she learns a lesson in humility. We get that lesson on a regular basis, if we’re paying attention.

For every moment we spend seeking forgiveness from someone, or offering it to another, we model righteous living. Each time we act in love, whenever we tell the truth. Whenever we share what we have. When we make choices based on compassion. Those are all times when we are walking that road to righteousness ***and*** we’re passing it on. I like to think of entertaining our college students as a part of that. We gave them a warm place to sleep, cooked dinner for them and spent time sharing stories. They helped us take down holiday decorations and washed up all the dishes from dinner! We are no longer strangers and are now imprinted with one another’s kindness.

Our baptisms send us down many rabbit trails, as we seek what God wants from us. And sometimes that purpose is right under our nose, an immediate need that we’re called to fulfill. Whatever you discover, make sure it is a part of God’s plan to fulfill all righteousness, even if it is just bit by bit. Now go forth to love and serve the Lord. Amen.

**Announcements:**

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