**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

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

**139 Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine! Accompanist Marjorie G. McKenzie**

**225 Jesus, Kneel Beside Me**

**275 Amazing Grace**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

God you make the blind see, the lame walk

You make us rejoice even in times of sorrow.

You are the power that encourages, lifts up our eyes.

In our blindness and in our lameness, from our sorrow,

Let our worship make us whole by binding our spirits to you once more,

Restored to shalom.

In the name of God the Father,

God the Son and God the Holy Spirit,

Three in One. 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 23 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

You are the Light of the World, O Christ. It is in you we find truth, beauty, hope, healing and peace. We confess that we don’t often enough notice you at work in our lives, but we often come running to you whenever we are in need of your help. Thank you for being there always for us. Please help us proclaim your goodness in all things.

For people traveling this week, we pray for their safety.

For our nation’s leaders, we pray for compassion, peace and wisdom.

For the people who have been injured or grieve in London, we pray for you to restore their joy.

For those who cower in fear, bring them strength in hope.

For those who suffer from loss, from homelessness, from hunger, we pray you feed them the Bread of Life.

In all things, let us rejoice for you are our Savior and our God.

We lift up the particular prayers brought before you this morning…

And in silence we offer you our supplication.

You are the Lord of Life, the Comforter and Encourager. In your Holy Spirit we pray like those first disciples were taught, “Our Father who art in heaven…Amen.”

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

What does the word “discipleship” mean to you?

To me, it means following Jesus, making ourselves His students. It means not running ahead of the class, but letting Him be our guide.

You hear the word “discipline” in the word “discipleship” and maybe that’s scary. “Discipleship” sounds wonderful, if we can take the “discipline” out of it. Discipline involves making rules and sticking to them, it might even make you think of punishment.

But maybe discipline doesn’t require punishment if we stick to it.

When was the last time you felt God had something to tell you and you heard it? How did you hear it? Did you follow?

I recommend that we take a mini retreat sometime during the week for that very reason. As Jesus told his disciples, “come away with me to a deserted place and pray a while…,” meaning, find a spot where you will not be distracted by work or household chores or phones or TVs, and sit still for 10 or 20 minutes. You can meditate on a word or a Psalm to center your spirit. Let that be quality time spent with the Creator. Then, if you have a question or a problem, meditate on that – write about it in a journal or some other way. You might not have an answer but at least you have given God your undivided attention. That could be a way to renew your discipleship – just 20 minutes of your time, given to God.

Discipline is really the same thing as practicing what we believe. It comes best with consistency. It also calls for us to be realistic in what we have time for. Most of us have 20 minutes for God.

**1 Samuel 16:1-13**

1The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” 2Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the LORD said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ 3Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you.” 4Samuel did what the LORD commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, “Do you come peaceably?” 5He said, “Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice.” And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

6When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the LORD.” 7But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.” 8Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” 9Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” 10Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD has not chosen any of these.” 11Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” 12He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” 13Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

**Gospel John 9:1-41**

1As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him. 4We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. 5As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, 7saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. 8The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” 9Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am the man.” 10But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” 11He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” 12They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

13They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” 16Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. 17So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

18The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight 19and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” 20His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; 21but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” 22His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”

24So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” 25He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” 26They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” 28Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. 29We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” 30The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. 33If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” 34They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out.

35Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” 36He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” 37Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” 38He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him. 39Jesus said, “I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.” 40Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” 41Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.”

**Sermon: “As Only God Can See”**

God can do things that we have never seen before. And God uses people to carry out His plan. The question is, “Are you paying attention?”

We can’t pay attention all of the time to what God is up to, for our brains would explode. But if we practice paying attention to what God is up to, our eyes can be opened, our spirits supple in God’s hands, we can be freer to live life abundant. Otherwise we could end up like the Pharisees in today’s reading: confused, unable to imagine God doing a new thing.

In both our readings today we have people who cannot imagine that God would do something unexpected. Jesse, father of David, couldn’t imagine that God might have had his youngest son in mind. He probably figured, “Well someone needs to be out there to tend the sheep. Surely the prophet will choose someone older anyway.” As we see, God is full of surprises – for it’s the little boy out with the sheep who would be anointed Saul’s successor.

And so it is with the Pharisees. They just cannot believe that the Messiah was in their midst. Moreover, that Jesus would heal a man who had been born blind! That couldn’t possibly be done. Healings were usually “restoration” to one’s previous health. But this guy had always been blind; there was no restoration possible for him. The Pharisees can’t believe their eyes nor their ears. They interrogate his parents, they interrogate this poor man twice – “Are you sure you were born blind?” Upon his second interview, he exclaims, “Do you want to go through this again?” Then he proceeds to teach them – the Pharisees get a lesson! His new sight has brought new insight about God. He believes that only a person who worships God could do something like this – something never been seen in all of history! The Pharisees are angry because it’s as if he is teaching them – and quite frankly, he’s making a lot of sense! At our story’s conclusion, they wonder, “We are not the ones who are blind, are we?”

Many of our healing stories leave someone sure that they have met God and others confused, angry, disrupted by their experience of Jesus. This is true for many of us. Jesus disrupts our lives sometimes, challenges us with a new view of God, gives us a lesson we had never heard before. Or, as in the case of the man who had been born blind, God does miraculous things in people we’ve written off as lost causes. What makes this story extra special is that a heavy burden of guilt has been lifted from this man’s spirit.

All of his life he probably heard something similar to what the disciples say at the beginning, “Why was this man born blind – was it his fault or the fault of his parents?” It was an assumption they made, probably based on what God says in Exodus 20:5: “…for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation…” It gave them an explanation for the evils that happen to people, especially for bad things happening to people where there was no other clear explanation. This man probably internalized that guilt, either in shame or anger towards the world or towards God. But God lifted him out of that guilt, by removing his blindness. So Jesus’ healing not only “fixed” his problem of not seeing. Jesus also helped him see grace – maybe true grace for the first time in his life and he believed this grace was directly from God.

Forgiveness was at the heart of this healing, a forgiveness that those Pharisees thought was impossible. Recognizing the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ at work all the time in our lives requires that we sharpen our senses to the mystery of God with us. There is a song we haven’t yet sung this Lent but it’s a good one “Have you seen Jesus my Lord?/He’s here in plain view. /Take a look, open your eyes. /He’ll show it to you.” And my favorite verse is the first one because it is a view we get every day: “Have you ever looked at the sunset/With the sky mellowing red/And the clouds suspended like feathers / Then I say you've seen Jesus my Lord.”

 I’ll bet you have seen Jesus our Lord. You might not have always recognized Him. Open your eyes to see the is grace all around – small and large gifts scattered around us. Prepare to be amazed. Prepare to love your neighbor and you’ll see grace in him and know it is God’s handiwork. Celebrate that. Prepare to notice signs of healing in yourself, and in those whom you had formerly had written off as too broken to fix. Make it a point each day to notice the small gifts God leaves for you of beauty, new lessons to learn. Begin with a sunset. 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!

Next Sunday is Holy Communion Sunday. The Deacon in charge of the communion elements is Dr. Jean Corey-Anderson.

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.