**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**April 25, 2021 4th Sunday in Easter**

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

RH 146 Hail to the Lord’s Anointed

RH 404 Jesus, Thy Boundless Love to Me

BH 343 Called as Partners in God’s Service

**Call to Worship**

We come to this place where God pours out love on us,**we join our voices in praise, as our fears are left behind.**  
We gather with these people, those who seek to follow Jesus,**so we might walk the paths of service hand in hand.**  
We open our hearts to the gifts of the Spirit,**so that grace and peace might be the fruit we bear.**

**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**

There are many things that can cut us off from the One True Vine. Our sins are like so much dead wood. When we confess the dead places in our lives, God offers us the forgiveness we need to prune them away and allow us to thrive once more. We come now to confess the parts of our lives that do not bear fruit…

**Prayer of Confession**

**Gracious God, we confess that we each have places in our lives that could use some pruning. Our words do not always give grace to those who hear, our actions do not always witness to our baptism in your name. We have ignored those who need our help the most and focused on hoarding more for ourselves. Our selfish desires only serve to wither us and turn us into dying branches. Forgive us, and prune away our dead places so that we may bear fruit generously in your name…**~silence~ **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

We are grafted into the Living Vine. The Vinegrower has tended to us and removed our sinful and withered ways. We are given another chance to live and bear fruit. For these gifts of love and life, let us stand and sing praise!

**In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven! Thanks be to God!**

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 22:25-31**

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;  
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.  
**The poor shall eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.  
May your hearts live forever!**

All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord;  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before him.  
**For dominion belongs to the Lord,  
and he rules over the nations.**

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;  
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,  
and I shall live for him.  
**Posterity will serve him;  
future generations will be told about the Lord,  
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying that he has done it.**

**Offering**

**Time out for Teaching: Philip’s Fascinating Journey**

Philip was one of the apostles of Jesus. Today you will hear of Philip in his breakout role as an apostle, that is someone who is “sent” by God. Philip is literally “sent” in this passage you’re about to hear. In fact, let’s wait no longer and read it together now.

It’s a fascinating little journey Philip takes, isn’t it? The Holy Spirit initiates the entire thing. The Holy Spirit leads him to the Ethiopian eunuch, who happens to be traveling by, reading the book of Isaiah.

It makes me think about what I may have missed out on. When the Holy Spirit sends us, prods us, sometimes we listen and find out there was a very good reason for it. Sometimes we fail to listen, fail to follow through. One of the things that is a repeated theme throughout the book of Acts is the recognition that God has a very special purpose for everything that God does.

For Phillip, the Holy Spirit drops him off when finished speaking to the eunuch. He landed in Azotus.

**Prayer for Illumination**

Risen Christ,  
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 8:26-40**

26Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) 27So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” 30So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:  
     “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
          and like a lamb silent before its shearer,  
               so he does not open his mouth.  
33  In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
          Who can describe his generation?  
               For his life is taken away from the earth.”  
34The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” [37And Phillip said,“If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”] 38He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**Gospel John 15:1-8**

1“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

**Sermon “Pruned to Grow!” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

The Family Dollar is now called Family Dollar – Dollar Tree. It finally expanded into the empty space, once occupied by SnapFitness, a gym which was open 24 hours a day. A few of us from the church belonged to it at one time. I remember seeing some of you there! After SnapFitness came under new managers, they redecorated a little, with inspiring signage. Some of them were quite witty. One said, “Sweat is your fat crying.” Another said, “One day this pain will make sense to you.”

That second one often made me giggle. One day… One day the pain of **most** things eventually make sense. It could take ten years for the pain of something to finally make sense. We may eventually find out that the pain we feel now might become a way for God to use us, but we just cannot imagine what that will be at first. Sometimes we have to be pruned, in order to grow a little more, bear fruits beyond our own imagination.

That’s hard to hear when we are in the throes of the suffering part of it. Those are the time when we are building and then rebuilding our lives. Those are the times when we find ourselves so ragged and worn by life’s troubles that we cannot imagine bearing much in the way of fruit. The times when all we can do is simply abide in Him, let the Vinegrower tend to us.

Jesus speaks to his disciples about the ways that God tends the True Vine, of whom we are a part. It really is close and intimate. We are the branches. Jesus is the True Vine. God is the Vinegrower, the one who prunes. Each branch is given special attention. Each one is watched and nurtured as part of the whole plant. Each branch is treated with the express goal of bearing fruit that glorifies the vinegrower. I imagine that God is the most detail-oriented Vinegrower ever. Even people like me, and my mother too, who like to grow plants, we check on them frequently, to see if the leaves are healthy, are there mites or other disease, are flowers coming out yet, does anything need to be trimmed… You will see me standing over a flowerpot gazing intently at what looks like just bare soil, but I am looking for the first signs of growth, those tiniest of leaves as they emerge. I imagine God does that to us, carefully examining us with the greatest level of intimacy, knowing us so well and where we need a little pruning.

God’s intent is for us to branch out, while staying connected to the True Vine. The only way to bear fruit for Him – to glorify the Vinegrower, who tends to us, prunes us, knows us well.

The British movie “Greenfingers” is a fun tale which begins with a prison inmate named Colin, a toughened criminal who has been moved to “Her Majesty’s Prison in Edgefield,” a “progressive” prison. He learns that his cellmate has cancer and he feels sorry for the guy. While he’s laid up getting chemo, he feels sorry for his cellmate and takes care of his hibiscus plant. So one thing led to another, and the warden begins a gardening program for the inmates. Their garden attracts a gardening expert named Georgina Woodhouse (Helen Mirren plays her) who sponsors them to enter the Hampton Court Flower Show. One good turn leads to another. The story of a lonely prisoner who had compassion for his cellmate bore fruit, which led to more fruit, to the enrichment and formation of a group of people who became friends. Bearing fruit to help them out, leads to even more wonderful things. Just like gardening. Starting something good may not seem like a big deal. Planting something and nurturing it seems to only lead to good things, and compassion is a fruit.

God wants us to branch out, and bear more fruit. But there is also an important caveat in our reading from John. Abide in Me, says Jesus. The fruit we bear is only if we abide in him. And as I said earlier, sometimes we are in a season of just abiding in Him. To abide means to dwell, or live in Him. Cling closely to Him, in such a way that you do not lose your connection. The True Vine is our source of strength. Live in me, says Jesus, and I will give you life. Cling to me, He says, when you are in a season of renewing your strength. Any gardener knows that we have different seasons – there is a growing season, and there are seasons for gathering our strength so that we can grow again! Some seasons are for cutting back, so we can finally bear the fruit God is bringing forth from you. For you have been pruned, and pruned again, cleansed, as Jesus says today, in your own very special way that is unique to you, direct from our Creator who never stops making new life happen. Do not fear the pruning, for there will be fruit to bear afterwards! And how exciting to find out what that will one day look like!

What have you got to lose? Just the dead branches that you don’t need. Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

Please eat the host and drink from the cup when I say, “The Body of Christ, the Bread of Heaven” and “The Blood of Christ, the Cup of Salvation”

**Invitation**

This is not my table.  
This is not our church’s table.  
This is not our denomination’s table,  
or an American table,  
or a table reserved for the wealthy or well-connected.  
This table is reserved for sinners,  
for the poor,  
for those who are cast out,  
for those who hunger and thirst.  
This table is reserved for all the baptized.  
This table belongs to Jesus Christ.  
Come.

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving.**

We praise your greatness, O Lord,  
and our spirits rejoice in you, our Savior.  
You looked with favor on your unlikely servant Mary,  
and she delivered a blessing for all generations.  
You, the Almighty, have done great things, and your name is ever holy.

From the depth of your compassion,  
you gave life to Jesus, your Son,  
who came to show mercy on those who need you most,  
from generation to generation.  
His perfect love showed your strength,  
and his humility made the proud stumble.  
His death cast down from their thrones the powers of death,  
and his resurrection lifted humanity up from the lowliness of the grave.

Come upon us now with your Holy Spirit,  
and let your power overshadow this meal, O Most High.  
As we share this bread and cup,  
fill us with the life of Jesus Christ.  
May we bear him into the world once again,  
so that we may empty ourselves of unjust wealth  
and fill the hungry with good things.

Make us your servant people,  
signs of your promise of mercy,  
in the name of the coming Christ.  
We pray in his name, saying…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Words of Institution**

**Prayer after Communion**

**\*Benediction**

**Prayer Requests:**

Betty (paralyzed) and Dolores (Alzheimers) – Glenda’s sisters

Betty Flint – fell and broke hip

Chris Quintana, Sr. – healing from knee replacement

Dorothy Randals – at Autumn Blessings, for strength and comfort

Elmer Schuster – multiple dental procedures

Fay Birch – stage 4 cancer, prayers for her husband, Larry too

Francis – Ryan’s Grandpa – traveling to see family in New Mexico

Juan and Rosa – for better health

Julie Sursa – pain with walking

Levi Mericle – thyroid cancer

Lucy Jasper – Alzheimers/Dementia

Luann and Bruce Haas, Randy Schuster – traveling mercies in Honduras

Lynn Hawkins – looking for a new home in town

Ruth Johnson – for general health

Sharon and Wayne Huffman – general health

Shay – Julie Sursa’s daughter

Susie Martinez – may need eye surgery, foot pain

Teresa Gallegos-Brake - healing from heart surgery

All those suffering from COVID19

Remove:

Lavone Bond – she is doing better

**Announcements:**

**PW meeting tomorrow night during Green Chile Gals:** Bring your own sack supper and we will discuss a little bit of PW business. The main item on the agenda is to discuss Rummage Sale options to present to the next Session meeting. And we also need to make plans as to our next scheduled meeting.