

**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**  
**Worship 11:00AM**  
**Sunday, October 15, 2017, 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord, descend upon us, we pray.

Trusting in your gentleness and mercy, we pray for your nearness to be known today.

We've come through a hard week, let us give thanks for the joys we've also seen.

We praise you for the provisions we've received each day. Thank you for your tender mercies.

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 106:1-6, 19-23 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord of all our circling years, we praise you for your constant love and mercy.

Our world is in trouble again and many who do not seek you first do not know of your everlasting love for them. We pray for those who do not know you that they may come to rely on you for hope.

Northern California is on fire. It is overwhelming, the destruction of life and property. We know how it feels to be afraid of fire, and this is a nightmare. God of peace, we pray you send rain to cool and dampen their land, that they may find resolution to this enormous disaster. We ask for you to continue to bring hope and healing to the South and Eastern parts of our nation, still picking up from their own disasters.

And for those of us in this community, who are cleaning up and picking up from burglaries, vandalism and theft, we pray that we feel the security of your protection.

Our political world is in turmoil, O Lord. Things are feeling upside down. We ask for your Spirit to help us find stability, although it is going to take time. Help us all to rely on you, to be peace-seekers as well as peace-keepers in our own backyards.

We are thankful O Lord. That Kay and Amber are both home after their auto accident and they are recovering. Please nurture in their bodies and hearts renewed strength and for Amber, that her unborn child grow healthy and strong.

For your people, O God, that in times when we feel like we are fighting an evil force, we grow to understand what is against us. That we know where it is coming from and how to handle it.

That your wisdom and truth shall reveal it and take away our fears.

For our thieves that they know of your love and purpose.

For our roofers that they are kept safe in their work.

Help Wayne and Sharon as they prepare for a new home, that all goes well and hereafter.

In silence we now lift our prayers to you.

You are the God of time, who has abided with us for all generations. We pray for your preservation and that you use us as your disciples to proclaim your power and love. Strengthen us through this week and that through our love they will know that we are Christians. In Christ our Lord, we pray, with the confidence of children: Our Father... Amen.

#### **Time Out for Teaching: Pros and Cons of Constantine**

Once upon a time, there was an Emperor and his name was Constantine. Constantine was not a Christian, but he had a vision of the cross, when he fought a battle against a barbarian army at the Milvian bridge. He was persuaded that Jesus, the “Christian God” helped him win that battle.

So, Constantine decided that those Christians should be allowed to practice their religion without fear of persecution. Up to that time, Christianity was considered an illegal religion. Its believers, criminals.

There are pros and cons about Constantine’s decision. Some say that by legalizing the faith, it helped our religion. People no longer had to die for the faith. Others say that because people no longer had to die for the faith, it weakened our religion, because Christianity now became sanctioned by the state.

Well, I personally am on the fence regarding this. In whatever case, we can only speculate what might have happened up to this day if Christianity had stayed an illegal religion.

One other contribution to our tradition is also thanks in part to the Emperor Constantine – the Nicene Creed. Turn to page 15 in your Blue Hymnal and you’ll see the “Traditional” and the “Ecumenical” version. Constantine is the one who brought together the Bishops of the ancient cities to force them to talk to one another about a disagreement they had about the personhood of Jesus Christ. Constantine believed that all these leaders should agree on everything if the faith was to remain strong. What came out of this council in Nicea was this creed. They managed to agree on the Jesus part of it, but they discovered that they did not 100% agree on the article of the Holy Spirit.

We know better than to think that all Christians must agree on every point of our faith. That the more we talk about it, the more we may find we do not agree on some things. But the most important stuff – that Jesus is our Savior – that’s what matters most.

#### **Matthew 6:19-23**

<sup>19</sup> “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

<sup>22</sup> “The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light; <sup>23</sup> but if your eye is unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!

### **Exodus 32:1-6, 19-23**

<sup>1</sup>When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” <sup>2</sup>Aaron said to them, “Take off the gold rings that are on the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” <sup>3</sup>So all the people took off the gold rings from their ears, and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup>He took the gold from them, formed it in a mold, and cast an image of a calf; and they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” <sup>5</sup>When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a festival to the LORD.” <sup>6</sup>They rose early the next day, and offered burnt offerings and brought sacrifices of well-being; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to revel.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; <sup>8</sup>they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them; they have cast for themselves an image of a calf, and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” <sup>9</sup>The LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. <sup>10</sup>Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation.”

<sup>11</sup>But Moses implored the LORD his God, and said, “O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? <sup>12</sup>Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. <sup>13</sup>Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, how you swore to them by your own self, saying to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants like the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” <sup>14</sup>And the LORD changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people.

### **Philippians 4:1, 4-9**

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

<sup>4</sup>Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

<sup>8</sup>Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. <sup>9</sup>Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

### **Sermon: “Things”**

American Humorist Art Buchwald once said, “The best things in life aren’t things.” What he meant was that we may have many things or not very much, but the true treasures of our lives are that which cannot be stolen from us – the intangibles. Love. Hope. Friendship. Faith. Family. And much much more. We have many intangible treasures, which make our lives full and rich, even if our bank account doesn’t reflect it. When we come the end of our days, will we take stock and be thankful for the big screen TV and fancy iPhone? Probably not. We will treasure most our children, the adventures we’ve had, our friends, our family, our church life and more. The best things in life aren’t things. The best things in life are those treasures stored up in heaven. The rest of the things are just stuff someone might steal from us, and pawn for \$20.

The Church exists in this world for a very important reason – to offer a physical location for the ministry of Jesus Christ. And because of this, we have a few things, valuable to us because they help us do God’s ministry. Every Sunday worship we are participating in that ministry by providing a space for people to glorify God and make an offering to continue His good works.

We have tools for those ministries – computers for communication, Sunday bulletins, maintaining a webpage (but right now we’re improvising, since the office computer was stolen). We have a phone to receive calls (except right now, since the phone splitter was stolen). We have a digital projector to use for yoga classes and movie nights and special programs (except the speakers were

stolen – fortunately we have been able to get those back). And we have buildings for our many things and to house your pastor and her things.

Perhaps if you're like me, last Sunday you probably felt a mixture of sadness, anger and anxiety. I did, as we looked about and tried to figure out which of our things had been stolen, determined what to do first, with repairing the broken window, carpet torn. To think someone valued things more than they valued the work of this church – to the point of taking away the tools of our church's ministries. It was valuable to us as the work of God's church is priceless. Sadly, these persons, some of them just juveniles, risked their whole future for money. Why, we don't know – it seems to be mixture of mischief, greed and maybe poverty. And that's no different from idolatry.

The Israelites did something similar, although maybe without the greed and mischief. They were anxious when Moses didn't come back down from the mountain. They began to grow worried and eventually, without their leader and without the message from the Lord on high, they started to seek a new god. Melting down their golden treasures, they made an idol. In this story, we usually focus more on the end product – the golden statue of a calf. But let's not be dazzled by imagery. Let's consider the ingredients they used. These nomadic people didn't exactly lug around a bunch of spare gold. The gold they used was probably precious heirlooms, the dowries of women, things signifying their connection to their families for generations and future security. If this is true, then what they used to make this idol were more precious than gold. And that was destroyed because they were afraid. A bit like our bandits in Fellowship Hall – the Israelites chose the more destructive, fearful way, instead of the faithful response to their fear.

Idolatry is a sneaky sin. How many of us have also committed it? When we have put our faith into things without persistently seeking God's help. When we have poured our energies into an effort only to realize God was already taking care of it. When we turn to habits and addictions that only perpetuate our fears and anxieties, rather than turning to our Lord. False gods are not just statues of

primitive people. We have our own false gods in the forms of ideologies and opinions which can serve to close our hearts to God's living presence among us. It takes hard work to chisel away at our idols. We have to be continually vigilant, for idolatry is sneaky.

I'll tell you this, however: if you feel at all angry that our church's "things" were stolen, it doesn't necessarily mean that you are a materialistic person. Research has shown that this is a normal stage of this process, especially when the object lost has not been recovered. This will pass. The church is not a place for crime. It is meant to be a place where love happens, grace occurs, joy enters in – a place where we live, play, worship, serve.

In the face of bad news, there is still plenty of good news here. Notice that God changes His mind sometimes, as He did with Israel. Moses begs God to not destroy Israel after their crime of idolatry. Moses presents a good argument. God hears Moses' intercession and changes His mind. This is a reminder that we too are the intercessors for the broken and sinful world. Jesus once said, "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors." Philippians too has good news for us. Whatever is commendable, honorable, worthy of praise, we are to keep our minds on these things. It means for us to remain focused on why God set this church in Tucumcari back in 1906 and to continue to rejoice. God has taken care of this church through the Dust Bowl, Great Depression, and much much more since. God will see us through for years to come.

Strange times like these can bring us all closer to each other, and to the mind of Christ. They remind us of what's most important to us as a family of faith. The best things in life are not things. What we have can't be stolen. Thanks be to God for His faithfulness. Amen.