**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 10, 2017, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**Accompanist Marjorie G. McKenzie**

**Minute for Mission: Pass the Bucket**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord, we come into your presence this day

With worry for those in the way of hurricanes and forest fires

With sad memories of the day our world was changed forever by terrorism

But we are here

To worship you, and to celebrate your constant presence

Whether it is a flood or a drought

Whether there is joy or sorrow.

For you are eternal.

In this hour, let our hearts be lifted again by your extraordinary love

Move us to miraculous hope against all hope.

We thank you for your Spirit which brings us comfort and joy.

Through Him who strengthens us we pray, Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession (please see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Surely, God is here, reconciling us through the gift of grace.  
**Surely, Christ is here, bringing the Good News of our salvation.**  
Surely, the Spirit is here, leading us to share this gift with others.  
**Thanks be to God, God is always with us.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

# **Psalm 119:33-40**

Teach me, O Lord, the way of your statutes,  
    and I will observe it to the end.  
**Give me understanding, that I may keep your law  
    and observe it with my whole heart.**Lead me in the path of your commandments,  
    for I delight in it.  
**Turn my heart to your decrees,  
    and not to selfish gain.**Turn my eyes from looking at vanities;  
    give me life in your ways.  
**Confirm to your servant your promise,  
    which is for those who fear you.**Turn away the disgrace that I dread,  
    for your ordinances are good.  
**See, I have longed for your precepts;  
    in your righteousness give me life.**

**Prayers of the People**

Your love, O Lord, reaches to the heavens,  
and your faithfulness soars over us like the clouds.  
We call on your righteousness, strong as a mountain,  
and your justice, deep as the ocean;  
for humans and all that lives on the earth,  
we call out for mercy.

For the peoples of Texas, Louisiana and Florida, we pray for them to experience your mercy and hope. For those who are there to help, them, protect them from illness, accidents and exhaustion.

For those who are seeing utter destruction from wildfires, we ask for you to bear your hope and help

For those of us who continue to live in the shadow of our memories of 9/11, we pray to see the light of a new day where you wipe away every tear and fear is no more.

For our first responders who continue to do their jobs, even when under heavy public scrutiny

For those who feel they have no voice in our nation, may your justice roll down like mighty waters.

For the many in our prayer list in need of help and healing…

For the comfort and peace of Zula Barnett..

For Don Wellborn’s continued healing after surgery…

Your love is immeasurable,  
and we lift up all your people who seek to know you.  
Gather us under the shadow of your wings  
and unite us with each other by your grace.

We pray for those who count themselves excluded from life’s good things,  
that they might feast upon the abundance of your house.  
We pray for those who hunger and thirst for righteousness or healing,  
that you would give them drink from the river of your delights.  
We pray for those whose lives are in danger or at an end,  
for with you is the well of life.

In your light let us see light,  
and in your loving-kindness let us make you known;  
we pray in the name of your Christ, saying together:

The Lorkjjjjjjyhu7yd’s Prayer

**Time Out for Teaching: Psalms of Wisdom**

This morning I want to say something more about the Psalms. Remember that Psalms were the words of people singing out their worship of Almighty God. Psalms were meant to be heard, for the majority of Israel did not hide away in their closet to read the Bible by themselves. There were many illiterate.

So that makes the Psalm we just read very interesting. It is the longest Psalm in the Old Testament and it celebrates the Law of God. It might also be seen as a Wisdom Psalm, which was meant to teach humans wisdom.

Let’s turn in our pew Bibles to Psalm 1 and you’ll see a very clear example of a Wisdom Psalm.

So, what do you think is a function of the Wisdom Psalms, if they were used in worship, sung aloud by a choir or by the entire congregation?

# **Ezekiel 33:7-11**

**7**So you, mortal, I have made a sentinel for the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. **8**If I say to the wicked, “O wicked ones, you shall surely die,” and you do not speak to warn the wicked to turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but their blood I will require at your hand. **9**But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die in their iniquity, but you will have saved your life.

**10**Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?” **11**Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?

**Matthew 18:15-20**

15“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

**Romans 13:8-14**

8Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

11Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers; 12the night is far gone, the day is near. Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light; 13let us live honorably as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. 14Instead, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

**Sermon: Raising the Bar**

Just the other day when I came home from the office – no sooner had I sat down on the couch than I heard this terrible grinding noise outside, the likes of which I’d never heard before. I peered out the window like a nosy neighbor and there to my surprise were some city workers on Crutcher Avenue, repairing the pothole that had formed around the manhole cover!

I **was** surprised, for I just figured the city didn’t care about Crutcher Avenue. I have had grass growing in the street by my yard for years now. But what surprised me even more was how surprised I was to see city workers doing their jobs– for it showed me that I don’t have very high expectations of our local government.

Kind of sad, isn’t it? Guess I’m like a lot of people: a bit cynical of how the world works or doesn’t work, and whether anyone in government cares. I guess I have low expectations. Or maybe I’m just a bit insular and self-centered.

This is how easily we can get dragged down by the behavior of others. Even in the church, we are in constant danger of expecting too little of our brothers and sisters, when the opposite should be true. If anyone should have high standards, it should be the people of God!

Instead of low expectations, maybe we should raise the bar for each other, even though that’s risky business. The risk is we might be disappointed or hurt. Many years ago, a friend informed me he wasn’t going to church anymore because someone in his church had hurt his feelings, and that someone didn’t even know it. Matthew 18 was echoing in my mind when I asked my friend, “Don’t you have a responsibility to tell her she hurt you?” My question wasn’t well-received, for what I was asking him to do was very difficult and uncomfortable.

This is exactly what Jesus talks about when he speaks about conflict resolution. Seeking reconciliation is vital to living the Kingdom life and it is one of hardest things we may ever do. So, Jesus takes time to explain to us step-by-step on how to do it. The early church had conflicts for sure – maybe more than we can imagine – just think about how our theology and doctrine had to evolve. It wasn’t by magic. It was through decades and centuries of disagreements. And of course, this gospel may be 2 thousand years old, but people and conflict really haven’t changed a whole lot. It’s just now we have more opportunities to get into it, thanks to the internet.

So now is as good a time as any for us to revisit this basic policy and procedure on reconciling with our brothers and sisters. Notice that Jesus instructions are like a flowchart on how to respond to different possible outcomes. If your brother refuses to hear you person-to-person, bring along a couple more to the conversation. And if this doesn’t work, then bring it before the congregation. If this doesn’t work, then you’ve done all you can and you’ve done what is expected of you. Jesus says, “Let him be to you as a Gentile and tax collector …” which basically means, “let him go…” Let’s just say Jesus is a realist when it comes to human behavior. He knows how people work. Some people you just have to let go and leave them to God. (“If you love someone set them free” could be the operative word here.) Others will appreciate the chance for reconciliation.

The good news is we don’t have to keep chasing after someone if we have done what we can to resolve our problems. But we also are expected to do our part. These are the standards by which the Kingdom of God operates. If the church were a corporation (and it is, actually), Matthew 18 would be a part of the corporate manual and a requirement of its employees.

Those are the expectations Jesus has of us and the standards by which we are called to live. The good news is others expect them of us too, so someone shouldn’t be disappointed but rather encouraged to see us living up to those standards. As I was encouraged to see the city workers doing their jobs, so I am always encouraged in my faith when someone cares enough to come to me with a problem.

Paul puts it succinctly in his letter to the Romans: “Live honorably as in the day,” by which he means live honorably, as if everything you do can be seen by everybody in the daylight. Sometimes we fall short of God’s standards, but we should never let go of them. This kingdom living isn’t easy and takes continual practice. Thanks be to God for grace, which multiplies when we share it. Try it. Amen.

**Announcements:**

Session Meeting is this Tuesday at 5:30PM in the Library.

Sunday, September 20 will be our next Potluck Dinner. Special thanks to Robin Cherry for being the hostess.