**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**July 18, 2021 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

RH 144 What a Friend We Have in Jesus

RH 298 Lord, Speak to Me That I May Speak

RH 485 Eternal God Whose Power Upholds

**Call to Worship**

You are no longer aliens.**We are citizens with the saints.**You are no longer strangers.**We are members of the household of God.**Here we are built into the dwelling place of God!

**Alleluia!**

**Opening Prayer**

It is well with our souls, O God, for we are in your presence. We come with all of the baggage of our lives and entrust all that we are to you. For nothing in this world comes close to your glory. Open our eyes to see your kingdom at work right under our very noses, and help us to participate in your work of salvation. Amen!

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession**

**God of Life…we are often overwhelmed…  
overwhelmed by our own needs; overwhelmed by our own schedules; overwhelmed by the summer heat; overwhelmed by our own responsibilities. We read the stories of Jesus, and see that he was overwhelmed, at times, too. People followed him everywhere. People wanted from him. People begged for him to do. And he gave…and he did. But he also stopped…rested…reflected…relaxed. We know we are created to care for others. And we know we are created to care for ourselves. So help us to find balance…and to live it… even now…as we offer to you our silent confessions…** (silence) **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, live and believe this good news:

**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 89:20-37**

"I have found my servant David;

with my holy oil I have anointed him;

**my hand shall always remain with him;**

**my arm also shall strengthen him.**

The enemy shall not outwit him,

the wicked shall not humble him.

**I will crush his foes before him**

**and strike down those who hate him.**

My faithfulness and steadfast love shall be with him;

and in my name his horn shall be exalted.

**I will set his hand on the sea**

**and his right hand on the rivers.**

He shall cry to me, "You are my Father,

my God, and the Rock of my salvation!"

**I will make him the firstborn,**

**the highest of the kings of the earth.**

Forever I will keep my steadfast love for him,

and my covenant with him will stand firm.

**I will establish his line for ever,**

**and his throne as long as the heavens endure.**

If his children forsake my law

and do not walk according to my ordinances,

if they violate my statutes

and do not keep my commandments,

then I will punish their transgression with the rod

and their iniquity with scourges;

**but I will not remove from him my steadfast love,**

**or be false to my faithfulness.**

**I will not violate my covenant,**

**or alter the word that went forth from my lips.**

Once and for all I have sworn by my holiness;

I will not lie to David.

His line shall continue for ever,

and his throne endure before me like the sun.

**It shall be established for ever like the moon,**

**an enduring witness in the skies."**

**Prayers of the People**

O Lord our rock, our hearts rejoice in you.  
Holy One, our strength rises up  
with joy in your deliverance!  
You know our every action,  
and you lift up those who stumble.

We pray that your peace would shatter the weapons of war,  
that your justice would humble those who fill themselves to overflowing,  
that those who are starving now would find food in abundance.  
We pray for lives that feel barren,  
for hearts that are bereaved,  
for all who are trapped by the power of death.  
We pray for these dear ones who are close to our hearts…

You, Lord, turn death into life.  
You, Lord, turn poverty into wealth  
and tear down the unjust wealth that drives others into poverty.  
When the world sweeps away those who are poor like dust  
and tosses out those in need as if they were garbage,  
you lift them up and restore them to honor.

You who established the pillars of the earth,  
guard our hearts and guide our feet,  
so we might be now and ever faithful  
to your world-transforming covenant faithfulness.  
We pray in Jesus’ name,  
who prays with us as we seek your kingdom…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Offering**

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Time out for Teaching: Great Moments in Heresy: Rebaptism**

I would like to talk to you a little bit about baptism, and “rebaptism.”

The Donatists were a group of Christians who lived in North Africa around 300 AD. Their issues with baptism came about after Christians had been undergoing intense persecution and martyrdom for their beliefs. Christians who recanted their faith in Jesus in order to save their own lives were called “apostates,” because they had chosen to turn to the ways of the Roman temple worship.

Many Christians were torn between the public worship of Roman gods and the private worship of Jesus Christ, in order to save their own lives and the lives of their families. There were those who refused to go to the Roman temples to worship and by the 4th century, their refusal could often lead to death, if they would not be coerced into denying their faith in Jesus.

But those who were coerced into denying their faith in Christ were then frowned upon by the Church. Thus began the controversy about what to do with apostates. Some said that if you want to get back into the church, you have to be baptized again. Others argued that you only need to be baptized once, in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (using the Trinitarian Formula). The Donatists said that there is no way that you can become a part of the church again without the ritual “washing” of another baptism, and to be sure that you are serious about returning.

But the majority of theologians confessed that they believed the Holy Spirit works so powerfully and effectively that only one baptism was needed. So, they said that you do not need a second baptism to return to the church, just a re-examination of your faith and continued participation in the Church.

I happen to agree with the more “orthodox” point of view and disagree with the Donatists. The Donatists’ doctrine has been labeled as “heresy” by a majority of Protestants and Catholics. And when we take the approach of confessing from the heart what we believe God truly is, sovereign, all knowing, our all in all, we may also trust that God’s spirit is truly effective in all God sets out to do.

We have baptized a couple of people who have been baptized before. Today this is done with very careful consideration. If the person does not think their first baptism was done with their true commitment, or if it seems that it was done under coercion, which can often be the case, then baptizing that person seems okay to me. For – it is always a celebration of God’s grace on their lives, a visible one so that others may witness faith in action, and an act of reaffirming the meaning of baptism for us all. Unlike the Donatists’ idea of rebaptism, it is not used as a mechanism to let you back in should you wander away.

**Mark 6:30-34, 53-56**

30The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. 33Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. 34As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and he began to teach them many things.

53When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. 54When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, 55and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. 56And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

**Ephesians 2:11-22**

11So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" — a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands — 12remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. 13But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. 15He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, 16and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. 17So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; 18for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. 19So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, 20built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. 21In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; 22in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

**Sermon “No Longer Strangers!” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

I absolutely love this section of the letter to the Ephesians. The imagery is such that it describes two houses divided. Strangers, hostile towards one another. This is what Jesus came for. He came, we are told, to break down the hostility between us. To create a new humanity full of grace, no longer strangers towards each other. The letter says that those two houses were divided by a wall and that wall has come down, so two houses have been joined as one household.

It’s a tale of two households, hostile towards one another, but discovering that grace and understanding can bring them together. Brought closer after being so distant from each other. No longer strangers.

You just don’t know what that grace may look like. Maybe when two houses find a common purpose.

Alana, a military contractor and Army veteran was working in Iraq as a military contractor, spied a little fluffball on the side of a busy road the Balad Airport. She hastily jumped out of the car, grabbed the poor little puppy and took him back to her office at the base. There are often dogs on military bases, for in places of war and conflict, animals get orphaned. Even though they are not allowed, many soldiers keep pets around, for they bring comfort. Alana decided to adopt her little dog, named Jet, because her contract would be over in 3 months. She found an Air Force vet in Idaho, named Tara, who has two other dogs and was willing to be a foster home. Alana also asked Tara, “If for some reason I cannot come home, will you keep him?” Tara said yes, to help the dog and to help a fellow veteran.

SPCA International helped her move Jet to a quarantine facility in Erbil, Iraq, where he was trained and cared for while they awaited transport to the US. After that, he flew with 4 other dogs from Lebanon to New York City, and after a little break, flew to Idaho to meet his new foster mom. To think of the many different people from Iraq, Lebanon, to Idaho, the enormous journey this dog took in order to have a home and be loved is truly astonishing. All for the love of one dog.

But just these amazing acts of kindness, to provide a little life with a safe home, were not enough. Caregiving is a loving and sacred endeavor, but not for just everyone at all times. Sadly, Alana realized after she returned to the states that Jet was unhappy and frustrated. She was gone at school and work for 10 hours a day, keeping him in a crate while she was gone. She talked to Tara about it, and after many serious conversations, Alana asked if Tara would be willing to take Jet back. Tara said she would, but she considered Tara a friend and wanted to continue to be friends.

What I love about this story was these two houses – people who didn’t know each other before – and then united to help an animal. Even though they both were from Idaho, they didn’t know each other until now, having reached out from Iraq to Boise. And after the long journey home, there was a new friendship and a common concern for Jet, who had come so far with the help of many people.

Ephesians reminds us all that we are bound to one another once that drop of baptismal water hits our heads. We become part of one house: One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism. But even the house of God can get divided, as it was in the day that this letter was written. Reading between the lines, there was a hostility among the churches of their day, probably stemming from the differences between Jewish and Pagan customs. But these customs they followed were from the time before they became followers of Jesus Christ. Different houses have different ways, but as members of God’s household, now those ways become secondary to God’s way.

Once we were far off, but now we have been brought near by the grace of Jesus Christ, to share this new and different way of life, the way of God’s own household. It’s easier said than done, but rallying around what matters most to us as God’s children is what can unite us, in spite of our differences. Every church family has its differences, because we came from different places, some of us adopted from very far away.

Perhaps it can help us to remember also that we are all adoptees, with the tendency to wander away from God. And God wishes to bring us back. Always, like the prodigal son of the gospel. Or like the hymn we sang recently from “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing,” which sings:

“Oh, to grace how great a debtor/Daily I'm constrained to be  
Let Thy goodness like a fetter/Bind my wandering heart to Thee

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it/Prone to leave the God I love  
Here's my heart, oh take and seal it/Seal it for Thy courts above”

We are all wanderers and God’s adopted children. All loved by God. All of us have been brought nearer to God’s heart by grace alone. Let us always try to see beyond the differences we have, strive for the greater mission to which we’ve been called: To be ONE House, NO longer Strangers, for this is one of the greatest expressions of God’s grace in our lives. Let us celebrate this fact by sharing a meal of Fellowship right after this service. It is the first potluck we’ve had since last year! Even if you can stay for a glass of iced tea and a prayer, please do. For it is good and fitting to see fellowship fill this space again. Amen.

**\*Benediction**

**Prayer Requests:**

Amy (Glenna Gray’s daughter) ongoing medical problems   
Betty (Alzheimer’s) and Dolores (paralyzed) – Glenda’s sisters  
Dorothy Randals – at Autumn Blessings, for strength and comfort  
Elmer Schuster - final dental surgery, leg pain  
Fay Birch – stage 4 cancer, prayers for her husband, Larry too  
Geri (Lavone’s sister) – recovering from arm surgery

Glenda Coles – injured rotator cuff  
Dr. Jean Corey, losing two employees, looking for new hires  
John McKenzie – for his health

Julie Sursa – pain with walking  
Laro (Marge’s daughter) – away from daughter for first time, safe travels

Lissa – Glenda’s granddaughter (high risk pregnancy)  
Lucy Jasper – Alzheimers/Dementia  
Lynn Hawkins – looking for a new home in town  
Marty Garcia – treatment for severe pain   
Ruth Johnson – for general health   
Sharon and Wayne Huffman – general health   
Shay – Julie Sursa’s daughter  
Susie – still seeking a car, planning for EMS school  
Teresa Gallegos-Brake – leg pain after surgery, may therapy help  
Travelers  
All those suffering from COVID19

**Announcements:**

**Ruling Elders:**  A Session meeting is called for Wednesday, July 21st at 5:30PM in the Library.

**Potluck Supper today!**  Stick around for fellowship at our first potluck supper in many months!