**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, March 11, 2018, Fourth Sunday in Lent**

**Accompanist Marjorie McKenzie**

**Hymns:**

**BH 85 What Wondrous Love Is This**

**BH 80 Jesus Walked this Lonesome Valley**

**RH 195 In the Cross of Christ I Glory**

**Call to Worship**

Come from east and west, north and south!  
**From everywhere God has placed us,  
with everything God has given us,  
as the people God made us—we come.**  
Come, receive again the gift of grace!  
**Not for owning, not for boasting, but for celebrating—we come.**  
Come, discover again the way that leads to life!  
**Remembering who we are, seeking who we are yet to be—we come.**

**Prayer of the Day**

Transforming Grace,

You did it already, long ago, out of your rich mercy, out of the great love with which you loved useven when we were dead through our trespasses.

**Call to Confession**

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

**God who pushes and pulls, coaxing and sending, we confess to you that we often resist your movement, wishing you would let us go our own way. If we’re completely honest, we give in to temptation more often than we resist. We confess that we have preferred to gorge ourselves on things other than your word; we have longed for power over others; we have bargained with your promise and begged for minor miracles. Forgive us, Holy One. Show us your way in the wilderness. Guide us to your path, and teach us to follow. We pray in the name of Christ, Amen. (silence)**

**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 107:1–3, 17–22 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

O Lord, you are our light and our salvation;  
we are not afraid of anyone or anything.  
When terrible things happen, we put our trust in you,  
and we know you are always with us.  
Help us to see you at work in our lives always.

We pray for people who are suffering or frightened today,  
and for everybody who is sick or grieving;  
wrap your arms around them,  
give them healing,  
and keep them safe.  
We pray that everyone would be able to sing your praises  
and tell that you have done wonderful things for them.

Show us how to follow you, O Lord,  
and help us live as your disciples  
as long as we live.  
We pray in Jesus’ name,  
who taught us to pray, saying:

The Lord’s Prayer

**Time Out for Teaching: Practicing Lent – Memory Verses**

For God SO loved the world…

For GOD so loved the world…

For God so LOVED the world…

For God so loved the WORLD…

Benefits to having a memory verse…

Drawbacks….

The smallest unit of meaning is a paragraph.

**Prayer for Illumination**

God our Parent,  
your voice claims us as your people  
and calls us into new relationships  
with ourselves and others.  
By your Holy Spirit, help us hear your voice speaking to us  
through these words of scripture,  
and prepare us for your service,  
in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**Numbers 21:4–9**

**4**From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea,[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers+21%3A4%E2%80%939&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-4345a)] to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. **5**The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” **6**Then the Lord sent poisonous[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers+21%3A4%E2%80%939&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-4347b)] serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. **7**The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. **8**And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous[[c](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers+21%3A4%E2%80%939&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-4349c)] serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” **9**So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

**John 3:14–21**

**14**And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, **15**that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+3%3A14%E2%80%9321&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-26126a)]

**16**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

**17**“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. **18**Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. **19**And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. **20**For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. **21**But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”

***Intro:***  The letter to the Ephesians addresses a “circle” of believers, not just the church in Ephesus, but possibly also other congregations in the region. Ephesians is believed by many to be a “circular” letter which means it was written to the congregations mean to be circulated from church to church.

**Ephesians 2:1–10**

**2**You were dead through the trespasses and sins **2**in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. **3**All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. **4**But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5**even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+2%3A1%E2%80%9310+&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-29218a)]—by grace you have been saved— **6**and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7**so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8**For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— **9**not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10**For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

**Sermon: Re-Creation**

Once upon time, there was a buffet table in our basement. The only times I ever saw that thing was when my brother and I would go down there to roller skate on the slick concrete foundation. The only one in the house who knew that buffet intimately was Patches the cat, who hid under it when we had visitors.

It came from my great-grandmother Armstrong, who was an expert in dinner parties since her husband was a prominent attorney in Indianapolis. The table was black – it might have once looked shiny and elegant in their dining room, but the shine was gone, rubbed gray from years of use. So it sat, obsolete, storing kitty litter and old newspapers.

Then we moved to a new house, and there seemed to be no room for that monolith of a buffet table. It got demoted to the garage.

My mom worried about it. Virginia summers usually range 80-100 percent humidity, extra hot in the garage, who knew how long it would survive? Then one day I said, admiring the big, curved silverware drawers, “Maybe I could repaint it and use it in my bedroom for my clothes?” She said yes!

So I spent a weekend, stripping the three layers of black, red and white paint, scraping, sanding, and painting. It went from a dull black to an Easter egg purple. It was transformed, not just cosmetically, but for a new purpose. It was lifted from basement standards to the second floor!

Our lives in Christ are similar. The grace of God isn’t just a cosmetic change when our lives become better because of it. We also get to learn about God’s purpose for us.

The Letter to the Ephesians points this out. It is a fair summation of Paul’s essential theology that salvation is a freely-given gift, one we cannot earn through our own works. It also reminds us that we have been lifted out of the deepest trenches of death and trespasses and brought to new life. No one can boast of being able to get out of such depths, without God’s help.

As long-time Christians, we might find it difficult to relate to this extreme imagery of re-creation from death and sin to everlasting life. Maybe you feel as though you’ve always tried to be faithful. Maybe you cannot remember a time when you were stuck in God’s basement, unimportant as that old table. But surely you can remember a moment when you desperately needed forgiveness. Or a those “phases” you went through when faith felt like you were just “going through the motions.” You might recall falling prey to a bad habit that became an idol, blocking your vision of the living God. It happens even to the best of us.

Ephesians reminds us that God’s rich mercy and great love for us, in spite of our past, has already lifted us up to new life. It is a process of re-creation, we are new creatures, and given a new purpose. It’s important that we not believe others who have written us off as obsolete, unimportant or unnecessary. Because God sees us differently, because God sees us with a Wondrous Love. John 3:16 also reminds us of. If we would just believe it, even just a tiny amount of belief, then that process of re-creation, which has already begun, becomes more visible to us.

Ephesians says, “For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.” More literally it is translated, “We are His creations, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared in advance…” See, the process has already begun. All you have to do is start believing just a little, in order to find out what good works – that is that purpose – God has planned for you.

The good news is, you do not have to chase your own salvation by trying to do good works. God has re-created you to **for** His good work, so the world will see what life in Christ looks like. Your salvation for good works is for the salvation of the world. Trust God’s process and God can show you fresh perspectives. Refurbished, Re-created and Repurposed. All you need is tiny amount of faith. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Don’t forget the Brown Bag Bible Study** for this Lenten Season! We meet this Wednesday at 6:00PM to study another of the Psalms. Discover what Psalm speaks most to you and make it a part of your life. Bring a sandwich you’re going to get hungry.

**Deacons** – you have a brief meeting to discuss this year’s communion schedule, directly after church today. Just stay in the pews and we’ll have a conversation. Thank you!

**Elders** – you have a meeting this Tuesday, March 13th at 5:30PM in the Library. An Agenda is coming. See you then!

**Prayer is good for your health:** Want to help at the Wellness Fair, April 7th? Amy is looking for one or two souls to assist her at the Prayer and Spiritual Health table during the morning at the Convention Center.