**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, March 17, 2019, Second Sunday in Lent**

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

**Prayer of the Day**

Lord, when we behold your goodness to us

We cannot help but to love you

When we remember the saving grace you sent us

Through your Son Jesus,

We cannot help but set our minds on higher things

And seek your grace out

For ourselves and one another.

Lift our eyes again from our busy lives

So we can think again on your thoughts of us,

Your goodness and faithfulness. 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 27 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

God of promise,

We come to you this day, waiting.

Your children, O Lord, are waiting to be seen.

We remember those among us who are feeling forgotten or alone or misunderstood. Grant them assurance that they are whole, and wholly yours, just the way they are.

Your children, O Lord, are waiting to be home.

Whether they have fled their old ones for a better life, been pushed out of them by others because of who they are, or whether they have slipped through systemic cracks to end up on the street, grant belonging and rest to unwilling wanderers.

Your children, O Lord, are waiting for justice.

We acknowledge those among us who have been victims of systems set up to make them fail.

Your children, O Lord, are waiting for healing.

Hold close those who are hurting in body or mind, whatever the reason. Grant them strength, courage, and the help they need.

Your children, O Lord, are waiting for peace.

Our country and world are fractured, and doing the hard word of making it better can feel insurmountable.

Faithful God, whatever our own uncertainties, breathe hope into our lungs and courage into our hearts. Not the easy or comfortable kind, but grant us, O God, hope in the unexpected promise of a world-changing child born from the humblest of beginnings. Grant us comfort in the words that that child would teach us to pray together: **Our Father, who art in heaven. . .**

**Time Out for Teaching: Of God’s Volition**

* Today we will be spending some time on how God sees us. That’s a hard thing for us to picture, normally.
* Especially if we take seriously the importance of being humble in life.
* We know that there is only so much that the human mind can know about our Creator, by virtue of the fact that we are finite beings and God is eternal, ever-present, all-seeing, and we confess that God created the universe, blessed it and called it good.
* From Genesis, we know that God sees God’s own Creation as good. So that gives us something to go on. But as we are told in those creation stories of Genesis, we are not perfect and need God’s help all the time.
* So we are about to hear something else from Genesis today. God taking the initiative with Abraham to – in a way – bless him. He has not yet been given the name Abraham but is still called “Abram.”
* Do you remember what Abram’s main worry was? - he had no children, so he was afraid he would not have a family legacy.
* And what does God do? God makes the promise Abram needs to hear, and see.
* God tells Abram to bring the animals needed for a covenant. And God makes that covenant with Abram.
* God takes the initiative and makes a promise to Abram. It was a binding promise because it was the kind of promise that united kingdoms, and families and traders. A blood pact
* God takes the initiative always and this illustrates one more thing about how God feels about us. God is faithful to us, even when we are not faithful to Him. That’s good news!

**Prayer for Illumination**

Author of our Lives,
we praise you for writing us into your narrative of salvation.
As characters in this chapter of your story of creation,
help us tell the truth of your steadfast love and mercy
to all who have ears to hear. **Amen**.

**Luke 13:31-35**

31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." 32He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. 33Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' 34Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

**Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**

1After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." 2But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." 4But the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." 5He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.

7Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

12As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

17When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,"

**Philippians 3:17-4:1**

17Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. 18For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. 19Their end is destruction; their god is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. 21He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.

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

**Sermon: God’s Joy and Crown**

The internet turned 30 this past week. Wired magazine published an article about it which took a rather sober look back at the last 30 years. They pointed out what they considered the positives. The web has become “public square, a library, a doctor’s office, a store, a school, a design studio and office, a cinema, a bank and much more.” (Wired, Tim Berners-Lee, 3/11/19) They say however, that while the internet has created many opportunities, but the divide between those online and those not online grows wider and wider. It has also opened new opportunities to scam people, new ways to hurt others, many new crimes to commit, because we have the internet. It’s made life easier in some ways, but also brings new problems.

It’s hard to fully celebrate. I have mixed feelings too, knowing this convenient tool also has the power to bring pain and suffering, and is only available to those of us with means. It makes me happy, for whenever I need or want something, I can check Amazon or eBay or set up a “notification” so I will know when what I want is available. Is that the joy that God promises? Maybe, but maybe there is more joy to be had – that joy that Abraham must have felt, when promised he would have generations of descendants, as numerous stars in the sky and grains of sand. Yes, I think the joy God promises us exceeds far beyond what we can access with our computers.

 Paul’s letter to the Philippian is about deep joy. It’s sort of like a “love letter.” Throughout this short letter, he thanks and praises God for their love and support to Paul, especially when he was imprisoned. And he writes to them proudly, “Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord, my beloved.”

 Now, some people are a bit quick to judge Paul, for he always wore his heart on his sleeve. But this little line to the Philippians shows us just his depth of his pride in the churches he started, a lot like the pride a father has in his child. They are his progeny, his pride and joy.

He loves them and is proud of them. And his pride in them gives him great joy. The Philippians had demonstrated great courage and faith. They did a lot to support Paul’s work in spreading the gospel throughout the world. They probably sent food, offerings and people to accompany Paul. They prayed for him.

No wonder Paul calls them “my joy and crown.” For he is their evangelist. He is their friend and leader. His instructions are to bolster the faith they already have, beginning with: “Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.” This is the key to how one gets to be called “my joy and crown.” “Imitate me,” he says. But he also means that they should look to one another, observing “those who live according to the example…” For there are pitfalls in life, troubles we face, and it is better to be firm in our faith, in order to resist evil. Imitating our fellow Christians is a way to do so, seeking their inspiration.

 It’s just common sense. The ancient saints have laid a path for us and we have modern-day saints, even some sitting in the pews around you. All we have to do is look for the best in each other.

 This past weekend I had the most wonderful chance to do that. Leading my brothers and sisters through a business meeting in Albuquerque for the Synod of the Southwest, I got to hear how other people are being the church around New Mexico and Arizona. I am humbled by the knowledge we are connected to others across a very diverse place, a tapestry of churches displaying God’s reign in different ways and places. Since I was in charge of the meeting, there were a few little goof ups and the music situation for the worship service was a bit awkward. But there we celebrated the fact that we are related by Christ’s blood to sisters and brothers in Navajo churches, African-American churches, Hispanic churches, churches in big cities and farming communities and old mission churches. I admire anyone who has given themselves to the work of Christ in their own area of God’s world, including you right here. Resist evil. Do good. And when you need some help and inspiration, look for the best in each other as examples. Look for the best in each other and I believe you shall find joy and be God’s joy and crown. Amen!

**Announcements:**

**Fellowship Dinner:** After worship, let us continue our unity by breaking bread together next door. Visitors and those considering church membership are encouraged to stay so we can get to know you better! A guest from the Tucumcari Police will be with us as part of a new outreach program to our community. Please stay to meet, greet and eat!

**Calling all Musicians:** We need some special music for Maundy Thursday (April 18th) and Easter (April 21st). Please contact the pastor (575-708-0860) if you have a special skill to offer in worship.

**Don’t forget to feed your fish:** One Great Hour of Sharing offerings continue to be collected in support of Self-Development of People, Presbyterian Hunger Program and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance. For more information, you can also visit: <http://specialofferings.pcusa.org/oghs>

**The Bible Study** meets this Wednesday at 6:00PM. If you want, bring a “brown bag” dinner. We are exploring the Psalms. Hope you can come!