**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, November 22, 2020 Reign of Christ Sunday**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 100 All Creatures of our God and King**

**RH 9 Now Thank We All Our God**

**RH 496 Jesus Shall Reign Where’er the Sun**

**Call to Worship**

God has said: “This is my resting place forever,
**Here I will reside, for I have desired it.”**
The Lord has chosen us; God desires to live among us.
**We are blessed to have God call us home.**
With God among us, we will be clothed with salvation;
**The faithful will shout for joy!**
With a faithful shout, we proclaim Christ our King!
**May the corners of the earth hear our cry:**
**Jesus Christ is our King!**
Come let us worship our one and only Savior!

**Morning Prayer**

On this day we gather in the shape of your sacred Kingdom, Lord. You have called us together and made us your people. You have set us apart to serve you and serve the least of these in your Creation. Let our words and song today celebrate your holy power and presence. For you are not just the Friend and Savior to us. You promise healing to all the nations, all of whom you shall put under your feet. Through the saving name of Jesus our Lord, Amen.

**Call to Confession**

The kingdom of heaven is a realm of reconciling love. Trusting in the promise of reconciliation, let us acknowledge our sin before God.

**Prayer of Confession**

**O God, King of glory and Lord of justice,
we confess that when we proclaim your coming,
we are quick to envision your judgment
for everyone except ourselves.
You know, more than we can admit,
how many times we have failed to serve you.
We have ignored you when you sit begging;
we have turned away when you starve to death;
we have been all too happy to let your suffering go unnoticed.
We have denied your sovereignty and exiled ourselves from the kingdom of heaven.**

**Lord, have mercy upon us.
Christ, have mercy upon us.
Lord, have mercy upon us.**

**Hear now the silent fears and worries of our hearts.** (silence) **Amen.**

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

Sing with joy to the Lord,
because our righteous Judge
is our loving Redeemer.
I declare to you, in the name of Jesus Christ,
we are forgiven!

**Thanks be to God!**The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 100:1-5**

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
**Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.**

Know that the LORD is God.
**It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.**

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
**Give thanks to him, bless his name.**

For the LORD is good;
**his steadfast love endures for ever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.**

**Prayers of the People**

People of God, Jesus comes to bring God’s mercy to all people.
Therefore we are bold to pray
to the one whose reign is justice, peace, and joy.

We pray for those who are captive to violence, oppression, and sin.
We pray for all who are hungry, sick, sorrowing, or afraid.

We especially name before you:

Tom Anderson’s Family, particularly Jean, preparing for services for him tomorrow

Dora Maes’ family in their grief

Emily Priddy, who has been sick

Anna Morris, in her stage 4 cancer/hospice care

For our community and state leaders, that we find social and economic stability during the pandemic

For travelers, particularly those heading for the holidays

For the healing of our nation

For Ryan’s grandpa, Francis

For Phil Gallegos, Kathy Martinez, Tess and Jonathan,

Our schools, teachers and students, as well as all of their families

For your very own peace and justice to reign in our hearts and wherever we go

We pray for everyone who longs for new beginnings.
We pray for those who celebrate and rejoice.
We pray for all who travel to be with families,
and we pray for those who celebrate the birth of the Savior alone.
We pray for the gift of peace, in our hearts and in our world.

We pray for those in positions of power,
for those who have more wealth and power than they realize,
and for those whom we are called to serve.

Let your kingdom come in this world, O God,
and let our hearts welcome the birth of the Holy Child,
who teaches us to pray as we say together:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “The Alpha and the Omega”**

On this Christ the King Sunday, also known as “Reign of Christ Sunday,” we mark the very last Sunday of the liturgical year. Yes. Churches start with Advent and end with Christ the King.

The annual cycle from Advent to Christ the King is offset from the regular January-December calendar year. Our lives revolve around the story of Jesus, from his birth, life on earth, death, to resurrection... then on to his ascension to Heaven where he reigns as Lord of All. I think it is important that we recognize His primacy over all, including Time itself.

Let’s think about the many titles of Jesus:

Prince of Peace…King of Kings…And, one of my favorites is “the Alpha and the Omega.” Alpha is the first letter of the alphabet. Omega is the very last letter of the alphabet. What do you think this might mean, to refer to Jesus as the first and last letter of the alphabet?

What does it mean to you, to think of Jesus as the first and the last, the beginning and the end?

The other thing that we claim about this fact is – not so much to remind us that Jesus is our Lord and King – but also that we live within His domain. We are blessed subjects to and for Him. How we live our lives as members of that kingdom speaks not only of our own faith, but of the faithfulness of our Lord towards us.

**Prayer for Illumination**

Come, Spirit of the Lord, and speak through us.
Send your Holy Word to be upon our tongues
and your gospel upon our hearts.
Speak to us, speak through us, speak among us,
for we, your servants, are listening.  **Amen.**

**Ephesians 1:15-23**

15I have heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love toward all the saints, and for this reason 16I do not cease to give thanks for you as I remember you in my prayers. 17I pray that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation as you come to know him, 18so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance among the saints, 19and what is the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who believe, according to the working of his great power. 20God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come. 22And he has put all things under his feet and has made him the head over all things for the church, 23which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.

**Gospel Matthew 25:31-46**

31“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ 37Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ 40And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ 41Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ 44Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ 45Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ 46And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

**Sermon: “Ruler of all Nature” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Fairest Lord Jesus – a beautiful, melodic song, singing of the Lordship of Jesus over all of Creation. Sounds almost like a lullaby. I love it. It is one of my favorites. Makes me want to stand and gently sway to the rhythm of it. We sing it well as a congregation too, since I think we all love it. It sings about the beauty of nature – of the fair meadows, the fairer woodlands, and much more of God’s created beauty. But it keeps on coming back, singing, “But Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer…” and in the third stanza, “Jesus shines brighter, Jesus shines purer than all the angels heaven can boast!” It sings of Jesus, and that he alone outshines even the most beautiful things found in nature. Theologians refer to this sort of thing as “special revelation,” the revelation of God’s goodness found in Jesus, even more special than our own idea of goodness found in nature. Jesus is fairest, and outshines them all, ruler of all nature. A special kind of ruler over nature, however.

As beautiful and true as this hymn is, we get another image of Jesus as ruler of all nature in our reading from Matthew today.

 Today we heard the well-known parable describing what it looks like for the Son of Man to judge the world, and who recognizes the difference between the sheep and the goats. This image is of a judge, but also of a Shepherd rounding up His flock, setting them apart from the goats. Our Shepherd manages them, sets some apart from the rest. We see the Shepherd’s authority as a discerning one, selecting out the ones who have done His will. And those who do not (the ones we often consider the “goats”), end up in the outer darkness.

 But something about this story has always seemed a little odd. In a recent article by Jill Duffield, of the Presbyterian Outlook, she points out that the “sheep” – the ones who eventually are spared that terrifying outer darkness – did the will of the Shepherd but didn’t realize that they were doing it to the Shepherd. “Lord, when was it that you were hungry and we gave you food, or thirsty and gave you drink?” They did it to the least of these, but did not know that the least of these bore the identity and likeness to the Shepherd Himself.

 Jill Duffield and I – and maybe you too – find this a compelling part of the parable. The sheep didn’t recognize the Shepherd in the faces of those hungry, thirsty, lonely ones. But the least of these are the Son of Man, in disguise. And perhaps that is part of the power of this parable. That we don’t remember nor recognize the face of our Messiah in those who are counted as broken or unimportant by society. The ones suffering in our world bear the marks of Christ, be it a physical poverty or a spiritual one. They didn’t know that they were serving Jesus when they served the “least of these” in the world. Yet they did, and became inheritors of the kingdom of God. These sheep didn’t need to know it was Jesus Christ in disguise. And yet, they were preserved, even become the inheritors of the Kingdom.

 This has many implications for us as hearers and doers of the Word. For we know that faith without works is dead (James). But also, salvation comes by faith alone (Romans). As hearers and doers of the Word, we know people who seem like righteous people, but who do not seem well-acquainted with the actual words of Scripture. Some of them may do great works of kindness and hospitality, but just like those sheep, do not realize that the recipients of their kindness bear the very likeness and identity of the Son of Man. But, because the Son of Man says that His image and likeness is found in the very least of these, the cast offs and untouchables, the cast offs and untouchables are worth saving. Because Jesus is the Least of These, he has deemed them worthy of salvation! These whom we think unimportant, are truly important to Him.

 God’s creation groans in need of redemption. God’s Creation includes not only humans, but all there is. All in all. Ephesians reminds us of the big picture: all things, shall be put under Christ’s feet. All things shall be brought unto Him. All that is in need of God’s healing. Jesus Christ is ruler and redeemer of all nature, Lord of All. Many forms of such redemption can be seen around us.

 Redemption of all that seems ordinary and overlooked, all that Jesus has chosen as worthy of salvation, happens like a cottage-industry. It happens in overseas and all around the world when we do things like send Operation Christmas Child shoeboxes to little children around the world. And it happens in our own backyard, when we notice where hurt is happening, and we do something to help. Even with the least of these things like stray dogs, who need a home. I have a friend who has redeemed and given homes to hundreds of homeless dogs. Ruler and redeemer of all nature, Jesus considers them worthy of saving. If we were to look at the lonely, the mentally-ill, the lost, as those worthy of Jesus’ salvation, we might act differently towards them. We might finally see a different, holy beauty in them, even those counted as the least of these in this world. For when we do it towards the least of these, we do it to Him.

 All that we see, including the very least of these in God’s Creation, are worthy of saving. For Jesus is one of them. Let us remember them, especially those whom we cannot help, as we continue to live together, within the reign of Jesus our Savior, Friend and King of All. Amen.

**THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**Social Distancing and Personal Protection.** Please respect one another’s space, observing the 6-foot distancing between one another. Please remember to wash your hands on the way out today. If you need a protective face covering, please notify the pastor and she can help you.

**The Next Session Meeting will be today after church in Fellowship Hall.**

**Operation Christmas Child boxes are due TODAY.** If you forgot to bring them to church, run home and drop them by while we’re in the Session meeting. As usual, Amy will get them turned in to Center Street UMC.