**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

The Church With the Holy Spirit Window

**Sunday, November 29, 2020 First Sunday of Advent**

**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 (please see bulletin)**

**Lighting the Candle of Hope**

Light one candle for hope.

Because the world is broken and the wait is long,

but hope just won’t let go.

Hope holds space for all our longings

lingers on the edge of harsh reality

like the dawn gently awakening the sky.

“Keep awake,” she whispers,

“for the world is being made new.”

So we light one candle, because it only takes one: Christ with us.

**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 (please see bulletin)**

**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 80:1-7, 17-19 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

O God of all seasons and senses,  
grant us the sense of your timing  
to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights,  
of grey and white and cold,  
teach us the lessons of endings;  
children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying,  
grieving over,  
grudges over,  
blaming over,  
excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.  
In this season of short days and long nights,  
of grey and white and cold,  
teach us the lessons of beginnings;  
that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,  
a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—  
something right and just and different,  
a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—  
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

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 and Ron Warnick, both getting over COVID

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

Betty Faye Ragan at the loss of her

Trey and Nicole Schuster – getting over COVID

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

Travelers

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

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: “With Every night…a Day”**

Beginnings are possible with endings. The poem I read above during the prayers of the people is from Guerrillas of Grace, by Ted Loder. It goes like this:

O God of all seasons and senses,  
grant us the sense of your timing  
to submit gracefully and rejoice quietly in the turn of the seasons.

In this season of short days and long nights,  
of grey and white and cold,  
teach us the lessons of endings;  
children growing, friends leaving, loved ones dying,  
grieving over,  
grudges over,  
blaming over,  
excuses over.

O God, grant us a sense of your timing.  
In this season of short days and long nights,  
of grey and white and cold,  
teach us the lessons of beginnings;  
that such waitings and endings may be the starting place,  
a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born—  
something right and just and different,  
a new song, a deeper relationship, a fuller love—  
in the fullness of your time.

O God, grant us the sense of your timing.

This poetry prays for us to be in line with God’s timing, even though we often stray from God’s sense of timing. While we await the Christ Child, we might as well wait constructively. As the poem prays, “teach us the lessons of beginnings; that such waitings and endings may be the starting place, a planting of seeds which bring to birth what is ready to be born…”

It sort of reminds me of a popular saying that I have always felt was true: “When the student is ready, the teacher shall appear” (attributed to the Buddha, although this is contested). As we wait patiently, prayerfully, I think we realize that Jesus is already there, because the Holy Spirit makes that happen for us.

What do you need to do, to get ready to meet Jesus?

What does it mean for you to have the sense of “God’s timing?”

What is your favorite part of about the Advent (waiting, preparing) Season?

**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.**

**Isaiah 64:1-9**

1   O that you would tear open the heavens and come down,  
          so that the mountains would quake at your presence —  
2   as when fire kindles brushwood  
          and the fire causes water to boil —  
     to make your name known to your adversaries,  
          so that the nations might tremble at your presence  
3   When you did awesome deeds that we did not expect,  
          you came down, the mountains quaked at your presence.  
4   From ages past no one has heard,  
          no ear has perceived,  
     no eye has seen any God besides you,  
          who works for those who wait for him.  
5   You meet those who gladly do right,  
          those who remember you in your ways.  
     But you were angry, and we sinned;  
          because you hid yourself we transgressed.  
6   We have all become like one who is unclean,  
          and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy cloth  
     We all fade like a leaf,  
          and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
7   There is no one who calls on your name,  
          or attempts to take hold of you;  
     for you have hidden your face from us,  
          and have delivered us into the hand of our iniquity  
8   Yet, O LORD, you are our Father;  
          we are the clay, and you are our potter;  
          we are all the work of your hand.  
9   Do not be exceedingly angry, O LORD,  
          and do not remember iniquity forever.  
          Now consider, we are all your people.

**1 Corinthians 1:3-9**

3Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

4I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, 5for in every way you have been enriched in him, in speech and knowledge of every kind — 6just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you — 7so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. 8He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Gospel Mark 13:24-37**

24“But in those days, after that suffering,  
     the sun will be darkened,  
          and the moon will not give its light,  
25  and the stars will be falling from heaven,  
          and the powers in the heavens will be shaken.  
26Then they will see ‘the Son of Man coming in clouds’ with great power and glory. 27Then he will send out the angels, and gather his elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven.

28“From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. 29So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates. 30Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all these things have taken place. 31Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

32“But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 33Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come. 34It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch. 35Therefore, keep awake — for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake.”

**Sermon: “Awakenings” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Leonard Lowe had been unresponsive for 30 years. His symptoms began when he was in elementary school, and began to have trouble writing his name out. Eventually he began to just freeze in the middle of doing things, like drawing a picture. One day, his mom found him on the bed, arm outstretched and he uttered the very last words he ever said, at least until – 30 years later – a kind, but very socially-awkward doctor got permission from Leonard’s mother to try an experimental drug on him. Dr. Sayer believed, based on just a little bit of information, that someone must be “in there,” and could reawaken with some encouragement.

Does this sound familiar? If so, you must have seen the 1990 film “Awakenings.” Robin Williams and Robert DeNiro star in this extraordinary movie based on the true story. It’s a tear-jerker, with a bittersweet ending. But it is filled with beauty. As the 1969 Leonard awakens, still the child from 1939, he also woke up to the world around him that seemed so new. Leonard tells Dr. Sayer, “We've got to tell everybody. We've got to remind them. We've got to remind them how good it is.”

“How good what is, Leonard?” asks Dr. Sayer.

Leonard responds, “Read the newspaper. What does it say? All bad. It's all bad. People have forgotten what life is all about. They've forgotten what it is to be alive. They need to be reminded of what they have and what they can lose. What I feel is the joy of life, the gift of life, the freedom of life, the wonderment of life!”

What an awakening. To recognize the true sacredness of this one life we have to live. To realize that we have a choice always – in how we shall see the blessings before us. This includes the blessings of God with us.

The holiday season invites us wake up and see the world with fresh eyes, if we are willing to take the time to look at it. Our first Sunday in Advent readings start out with quite a bang, definitely designed to wake us up! Mark’s little apocalypse reveals God’s powerful arrival into this world. Jesus speaks of things to come, things that we wouldn’t ordinarily know without God’s help. Only the Lord can predict such things. And the prediction contains the charge: “Beware…keep alert,” and again “Keep awake… Keep awake.” I think Jesus wants us to pay attention and stay awake, don’t you?

The importance that we stay wakeful is not a new idea to us Bible readers. It is necessary that we stay on point and ready whenever the opportunity presents itself to meet our Lord. It doesn’t mean we should never close our eyes to rest, but it does mean that we should be prepared to meet him. Jesus compares it to the household that is always ready to receive the master of the house returning from a long journey. We are to be ready for whenever he comes home. It could be midnight or breakfast or any other time. We just don’t know when. And even though this story appears to be about the very end of times, it suggests with some of the present verb tenses that this could be at any moment. For those of us who confess God is already with us, we need to ready to see the glory of God revealed.

Our preparedness can look a lot like Leonard Lowe, who woke up from 30 years of catanoia, and now sees the world through the eyes of an awestruck child. Maybe it also means we should be prepared for action? For a lively life of faith, we do not just sit idly and wait, but actively engaging the world around us. Maybe our active waiting could be a little like Texas A&M football games. Since 1922, Texas A&M students have stood up during their games. It started with a game when they were down by one player on the field, many teammates injured. The coach called down King Gill, who was helping out in the press box. Gill came down, put on a uniform and supported the team. They won 22-14, one of the greatest upsets in the university’s history. Now, Aggie students stand for every game, ready, watchful, just in case they are needed.

Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know when the Son of Man shall arrive. For you do not know when you will be called up.

Wakefulness is a popular theme in the New Testament. Jesus chides his disciples for falling asleep as he prayed in the garden, knowing that soon he would be arrested, tried, put to death and in three days rise. And as he agonized in prayer, the disciples couldn’t keep their eyes open. This is just one of the times when the disciples are told that wakefulness is important, vastly important. The Son of Man was already with them, in the garden as he prayed. Keep awake, friends, for you are already in the presence of God, in the flesh, in the garden.

I would like to leave you with one more story of alertness and watchfulness I just stumbled upon this week. While visiting the Huffmans, they were telling us funny stories about their dog, Tucker, a very smart German and Belgian shepherd mix. When David comes home from work, all they have to do is just whisper, “Daddy’s home” and he leaps to his feet with a happy bark, ready to run and meet “Daddy.” After all, isn’t that what we should also be doing? In that apocalyptic moment, and maybe anytime we feel God’s presence near, if we are able to rejoice, then we are prepared. Children of God, let us look forward to the day when we can all leap to our feet with joy, and run to meet the Son of God. Don’t sleep through the waiting time. Awaken and Rejoice! Daddy’s already home. 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.