**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, November 3, 2019 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**RH 407 Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart**

**RH 304 O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee**

**RH 485 Eternal God Whose Power Upholds**

**Call to Worship**

Come, children of God, and be welcomed here as you are.  
**We gather in this place to worship God and God alone.**  
Come, children of God, and be fed at the Lord’s Table.  
**We come to receive what we need for the journey ahead.**  
Come, children of God, and let us find the fuel for our faith.  
**We come to the Table to receive God’s blessing and share it with others.**  
**Let us worship God!**

**Prayer of the Day**

God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
God of our fathers and mothers,  
Who sees the struggles of your people,  
and comes to save,  
Give us eyes to see you in burning bush,  
feet to feel the holy ground beneath us,  
and hearts willing to go where you send us,  
So that all your people may know your salvation. **Amen**.

**Call to Confession**

Our lives are full of mistakes and errors – places where we follow self-generated idols instead of the One True God. We are not alone in these mistakes – all of those who have come before us also were plagued with temptation and sin. Let us come before God, just as generations of believers have done, and pray for God’s forgiveness and grace.

**Beloved God, who was known to our mothers and fathers, and even to our spiritual forebears, have mercy on us. We do not always love as you would have us love. We do not always do as you would have us do. In our stubbornness, we turn from you when we should turn toward you. Hold us, dear One – comfort us when we mourn the passing of friends and family, and help us to know that they are rejoicing in your presence. We praise you for the grace you shower on us, constantly forgiving our errors, especially the ones that we don’t share with any but you. Hear now the silent fears and worries of our hearts.**

*A time of silence*

**Assurance of Pardon**

Friends, hear the good news! Though thousands upon thousands of our ancestors did not follow God’s ways perfectly, we have hope in the one who did! Jesus, a man of a particular people in a particular time, taught through his words and deeds that God has already forgiven us. Thus, we and all who have come before us are rightly known as saints – the holy ones of God! Thanks be to God for God’s mercy, grace, and love! **Amen!**

In Christ’s name, I announce to you that our sins are forgiven!  
**Alleluia! Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 119:137-144**

You are righteous, O LORD,

and your judgments are right.

**You have appointed your decrees in righteousness**

**and in all faithfulness.**

My zeal consumes me

because my foes forget your words.

**Your promise is well tried,**

**and your servant loves it.**

I am small and despised,

yet I do not forget your precepts.

**Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness,**

**and your law is the truth.**

Trouble and anguish have come upon me,

but your commandments are my delight.

**Your decrees are righteous forever;**

**give me understanding that I may live.**

**Time out for Teaching: Ordained Ministry Part 2: What Does a Deacon Do?**

It seems meet and right that I should be raising the topics of Ordained Officers. Last week, I described the Ruling Elders, aka “Elders” of the church. When a person joins the church, by making a profession of faith, it is that member’s joy and responsibility to the house of God that she or he participates in the nominating process. You participate by helping us all together, by offering yourself or someone else to serve as an Elder or a Deacon. We have 6 slots for Elders and we meet once a month, on average, or if there is a need for a special meeting, we will call them. You nominate these Elders because you believe God has formed them for certain gifts and skills that the church needs and you trust them to govern this church.

A little bit about church government: We govern by a majority rule. When Elders meet up, we follow an agenda of items that come from you, as well as routine business that requires regular review, such as the status of our treasury, the care of our buildings and grounds, the needs of our members, mission to the community and more. In certain instances, we might need a ¾ majority to vote for something to pass, but usually, if we have a 2/3 majority, that’s enough. In my opinion, as such a small church, we usually don’t have a lot of difference of opinion, and after some discussion, we often find a consensus, which is a general agreement.

While the Elders, who is called our “Form of Government,” that is guided by the conscience and faith of those whom we trust and respect among the congregation, meet about once a month, our Deacons are horses of a different stripe. Deacons work things out in their own way. Even though we as a church give them a lot of free rein, technically if something was really wrong with them, our Elders would have to step in and help resolve the issues. However, again because we are a small church and many Deacons and Elders have swapped jobs over the years.

So, raise your hands if you have been or currently are a Deacon. How many of you have also been Elders before?

So what do Deacons in our church do?

Our Book of Order tells us that Deacons have a lot of leeway as to what their responsibilities are. It tells us that Deacons are to encourage generosity, perform acts of caring for the congregation, charge the church to do evangelism and mission and much more. In some churches, that has included teaching Sunday School, or new church member orientation, taking up offerings and setting up for the sacraments of Baptism and Communion.

Our Deacons elect their own chair and their chair person gets them organized each year for the functions they do. We also use the Deacon’s Fund to send people flowers when they are sick. The colorful envelopes in the pew are envelopes we use to make donations to the Deacons’ Fund.

**Prayer for Illumination**

Holy God:  
with the precious jewel  
of holy scripture,  
you share with us  
the treasure of your heart.  
Engrave your covenant –  
your hopes, your dreams,  
your vision, your peace –  
upon our hearts,  
that they might beat  
as one with yours.

**2 Thessalonians 1:1-4, 11-12**

1Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

3We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of everyone of you for one another is increasing. 4Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

11To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, 12so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

**Gospel Luke 19:1-10**

1He entered Jericho and was passing through it. 2A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. 4So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. 5When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today." 6So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. 7All who saw it began to grumble and said, "He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner." 8Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, "Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much." 9Then Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. 10For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost."

**Sermon: This Old House**

Every year, there would be a big family gathering at my great grandmother’s house. Usually around Easter, we would gather at her old house in Indianapolis. In that old house, my maternal grandmother and her three sisters grew up, and they would return for decades after, bringing their children and children’s children for holidays and summer vacations. My brother Jason and I remember Easter egg hunts on the front lawn, although none of our other cousins are old enough to remember that old house. The stories, the memories within those walls, what it felt like to be surrounded by artifacts of our family tree, are with us now. Warm summer nights sleeping with the windows open, having our hair washed in the kitchen sink, playing in the garden, being scared of the attic – and that you needed a skeleton key for the front door - are memories Jason and I have, but because we are the oldest children of our family’s generation, these memories of the place stop with us.

In that old house, we were always surrounded by memories and folklore of our family tree. We learned stories of how people fell in love, of grand parties that had been held there, and of those who had died from cancer or Parkinsons’. We often talked about the big granite millstone in the backyard garden, how loved it was by children of every generation, as a special place to sit among the lilies of the valley, roses and coral bells.

My great-grandmother Ruth May Armstrong had German blood in her. She had dark, comely eyes. She was small, active, and sturdy. In the winter, she would shovel coal into the furnace after the coal man delivered it down the chute. She would wake up at 3:00AM to knead dough, so that by breakfast time, the smell of sweet orange rolls was in the air. She was a saint of the family and took pride in providing every detail of hospitality for us.

She was a wee little woman. She was at the time of her death probably about 4ft 7in. But the memories and lessons learned, the grounding of a home and family of whom she was a big part, were larger than any one life lived. The greatness of my great-grandmother, as tiny a person as she was, was full of the lives of earlier saints, ones she grew up knowing, and passed on to us. And what these people have done is filled us for a life and then some, and now mixes with you and everyone else I know. Our lives together as the church is really a blend of all the saints whom we have known. We all bring the stories of our families into this place, whether we know it or not. In our sharing this, we form a house where God dwells among us.

The saints we know have helped to make a house a home. They also have done so on a grander scale – this church home that we have in Jesus Christ. Home is the place we can go to be welcomed, fed, and refreshed whenever we feel like the world has been beating us up. A good church worth its salt is a place where there is welcome and care, the sort you might expect from your very own loved ones. Here we celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ has found a home with us and makes us a part of his family.

That is one of the compelling messages about Zacchaeus, the wee little man. Tax Collectors were maligned by Jewish Society. No one ever called ***them*** “saints.” They were allowed to levy taxes higher than what Rome was exacting, so that they could make more money. Furthermore, they were maligned by fellow Jews because they were working for the Empire; just being employed to collect taxes for the Emperor meant you were serving the Emperor and that seemed contrary to the belief that God alone is Lord, and no one else.

Little Zacchaeus was probably pretty down about being labeled a sinner. But this didn’t keep him from seeking the true God in Jesus Christ. I suppose it might have been a little harder to have also been a wee little man. However, he was so determined to see Jesus that, true to any kind of collector, resourceful, he figures out how to get a good look.

His choice to climb a tree – a grown man! – just demonstrated how eager he was for Jesus. Jesus also noticed him! So, Jesus promises to come to stay at his house. Just imagine how that might have felt to think someone so important would be coming to your house – God in the flesh! Even though we don’t know what sort of party it turned into, we do know that it was the first day of the rest of Zacchaeus’ life, when he learned that no matter how maligned he was by his fellow Jews, he was loved enough by God that Jesus would live with him.

What would you do if Jesus told you that he was coming to stay with you today? Well, Jesus has already decided to do that. In your house. And in this old house. It’s a place full of memories and saints gone by. A place where learning happens and where we find our own family of modern-day saints.

Several ancient theologians, including St. Augustine of Hippo, St. John Chrysostom and Abigail van Buren have been quoted to say, “A church is a hospital for sinners, not a museum of saints.” I think that is what Jesus also would have said. It’s why he came to visit Zacchaeus, who, upon Jesus’ visit to his old house, repented of his sins and promised to live a clean life.

We all want to see Jesus! And we really do when we see each other living into the sainthood as servants in God’s house. Zacchaeus’ story is a reminder that even if we think we’re bad people, Jesus still loves us enough to stay with us, and help us along as we recover from our sin. As with Zacchaeus, who repents when Jesus visits, we too are called into repentant lives, thankful and glad for his healing love. For in this old house, lessons are learned, new memories made, and the stories of our lives show forth our joy that God is with us. The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost and that’s everyone. Thanks be to God! Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

Jesus offers an invitation we all need to hear:  
“Let the little children come to me…”  
Let the humble, the meek, the ignored come.  
Let the noisy, the misbehaving, the boisterous come.  
Let the ones who ask the hard questions come.  
Let the ones who trust in ways we cannot understand come.  
Let all come to the table,  
“…and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”  
It is to us, my friends, that the kingdom of God belongs.  
All are welcome at this table.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you

**And also with you**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We praise and thank you, Lord,  
because you do wonderful things.  
In Jesus Christ, you make your salvation known  
for all people,  
completing the faithfulness you promised  
to the house of Israel,  
which you remember still.

Through these gifts of bread and cup,  
we join all the earth in praising you.  
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us  
as we share in this meal.

As you feed us,  
make us instruments of your praise  
and servants of your faithfulness.

Keep us faithful in Christ’s service  
until he comes at long last to establish justice and plenty on the earth.  
We pray with and for all people,  
joining in the prayer Christ taught, saying…  
*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Distribution of Elements**

**Prayer after Communion**

Christ our Lord,  
at this table you have given us a taste  
of the joyful feast you promise to your blessed ones.  
Let this meal strengthen us for the work of discipleship,  
and let us serve you in all that we do  
for the least of these your siblings. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes:** We are preparing for this year’s shipment of Operation Christmas Child Shoeboxes. Please pick up your shoebox and instruction booklet today! We need your shoeboxes back at our church on Sunday, November 10th, so that the Methodists have time to pack it all in. Bring them to church and we will pray a blessing over them as part of the offering.