**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, November 8, 2020 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 140 Rejoice, the Lord is King**

**RH 242 O Spirit of the Living God**

**RH 310 Take My Life and Let It Be**

**Call to Worship**

God calls us to worship, lifting our voices and our hearts in praise.

**God calls us to worship, lifting our hands and our resources to serve.**

God calls us to worship, when we are together and when we are alone.

**God calls us to worship, in the sanctuary and on the street corner.**

God calls us to worship, with our everyday choices and our Sunday best.

**God calls us to worship, in song and prayer and in doing justice and loving kindness.**

Let’s answer the call!

**Morning Prayer**

**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.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Faithful God, we confess our own short-sightedness. Instead of placing all our trust in you and going forward in faith, we have given ourselves to other gods: proven results, quick fixes, and easy outs. Welcome us again into your loving arms. Be quick to forgive us and restore us to faith. Set our hope in you and remind us again of your mighty power and goodness. Help us to rededicate ourselves in your holy name. Hear now the silent fears and worries of our hearts.** (silence) **Amen.**

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

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!**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 34:1-10, 22**

I will bless the Lord at all times;  
his praise shall continually be in my mouth.  
**My soul makes its boast in the Lord;  
let the humble hear and be glad.**O magnify the Lord with me,  
and let us exalt his name together.

**I sought the Lord, and he answered me,  
and delivered me from all my fears.**Look to him, and be radiant;  
so your faces shall never be ashamed.  
**This poor soul cried, and was heard by the Lord,  
and was saved from every trouble.**The angel of the Lord encamps  
around those who fear him, and delivers them.  
**O taste and see that the Lord is good;  
happy are those who take refuge in him.**O fear the Lord, you his holy ones,  
for those who fear him have no want.  
**The young lions suffer want and hunger,  
but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.**

The Lord redeems the life of his servants;  
**none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.**

**Prayers of the People**

Hear, O Lord, the prayers of your people;  
incline your ears to the words of our mouth.  
We call out to you on account of your faithfulness,  
for you are the Ancient of Days, and your word never fails.

Keep faith with those in need today,  
as you have forever before,  
so we might sing your praises for generations to come.

Be faithful to the young, who are just learning the ways of the world.  
Be faithful to those who are older,  
and especially to those who struggle with disease of body or mind.

Be faithful to those who are poor, injured, grieving, or under threat;  
that your wholeness, your peace, and your joy may be restored.  
We put our trust in you,  
remembering your gracious works  
made real for us in Jesus Christ, in whom we pray:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Who are these Bridesmaids?”**

Today you will hear a parable of Jesus about the 10 bridesmaids. The story takes place towards the end of the gospel of Matthew, but is the very first parable in Matthew Chapter 25. I would say that Matthew 25 is kind of apocalyptic in nature. Apocalyptic means “unveiling.” The Book of Revelation, in the original Greek, is “Apocalupsis Ioannou,” meaning “unveiling of John.” Chapter 25 is a revelation from Jesus Christ. A peek behind the curtains.

The parable is a peek behind the curtains with a parable about 10 bridesmaids. 5 of them were foolish and 5 were wise. The foolish didn’t bring any oil with them, and the wise brough flasks of oil, because they were prepared for the dark night. There was about to be an all night wedding party, so everyone took a nap. But at midnight, the ones who wisely brought with them the extra oil were able to get up and go straight to that bridegroom. The foolish ones had to go to the late night market before they could go to the party. But they were too late to the party. They were late, and therefore not recognized by the bridegroom.

It’s not the only story in which those who are late aren’t recognized or allowed into a party. Remember the other parable of a wedding banquet in which the invited guests did not come, and so they brought in everyone from the streets. Then, one of these guests did not come dressed in the right outfit (a wedding garment), this guy and others like him were thrown out with weeping and gnashing of teeth.

What do you think this says about what God wants us to do? There are couple of things that we could say:

During the ancient church, there were troubling situations between Jews and Christians. There were those who were Jews – turned Christian and there were the Gentiles who had little to no Jewish roots. There was a sense of who came first. And there was a concern for those who chose not to come to God at all. This story could point to the fact that God chose not only faithful Jews to come to His wedding banquet. God also invites the gentiles, as there would be many Jews who did not heed the call.

It all may say something about how we present ourselves before God and others. Are we properly prepared to shine the light on Christ on the big day when we meet him? And, isn’t it true that we are constantly in a position when we might?

It is up to us as to how we look at it and respond to the opportunity. Five bridesmaids went out to meet the bridegroom. Five were late because they weren’t ready. What are we doing to be ready?

**Prayer for Illumination**

Fire of the Holy Spirit, light the lamps of our hearts. Shine with the light of your Truth, that as we read your scriptures, we see your love flowing through everyone we meet. Amen.

### Gospel Matthew 25: 1-13

“Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. 2Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. 3When the foolish took their lamps, they took no oil with them; 4but the wise took flasks of oil with their lamps. 5As the bridegroom was delayed, all of them became drowsy and slept. 6But at midnight there was a shout, ‘Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’ 7Then all those bridesmaids got up and trimmed their lamps. 8The foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.’ 9But the wise replied, ‘No! there will not be enough for you and for us; you had better go to the dealers and buy some for yourselves.’ 10And while they went to buy it, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went with him into the wedding banquet; and the door was shut. 11Later the other bridesmaids came also, saying, ‘Lord, lord, open to us.’ 12But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I do not know you.’ 13Keep awake therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18**

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**Joshua 24:1-3a, 14-25**

Then Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel to Shechem, and summoned the elders, the heads, the judges, and the officers of Israel; and they presented themselves before God. 2And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the Lord, the God of Israel: Long ago your ancestors—Terah and his sons Abraham and Nahor—lived beyond the Euphrates and served other gods. 3Then I took your father Abraham from beyond the River and led him through all the land of Canaan and made his offspring many. I gave him Isaac;

14 “Now therefore revere the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. 15Now if you are unwilling to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served in the region beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

16 Then the people answered, “Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods; 17for it is the Lord our God who brought us and our ancestors up from the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, and who did those great signs in our sight. He protected us along all the way that we went, and among all the peoples through whom we passed; 18and the Lord drove out before us all the peoples, the Amorites who lived in the land. Therefore we also will serve the Lord, for he is our God.”

19 But Joshua said to the people, “You cannot serve the Lord, for he is a holy God. He is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions or your sins. 20If you forsake the Lord and serve foreign gods, then he will turn and do you harm, and consume you, after having done you good.” 21And the people said to Joshua, “No, we will serve the Lord!” 22Then Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen the Lord, to serve him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.” 23He said, “Then put away the foreign gods that are among you, and incline your hearts to the Lord, the God of Israel.” 24The people said to Joshua, “The Lord our God we will serve, and him we will obey.” 25So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and made statutes and ordinances for them at Shechem.

**Sermon: “God’s Chosen Must Choose” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

“As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” These words ring familiarly with many of us. Maybe you have seen that framed painting that looks a little bit like a Rembrandt painting of a man with a beard. Below the image of this wizened man, there reads: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”

These are the words of Joshua, who leads the way. It takes place in the very last chapter of the book, in which the Israelites can finally rest, victorious, having taken over the Promised Land. Now in their rest, they’re being reminded why they were successful in the first place. They defeated all manner of Canaanite, but before they can stop and settle down, Joshua gathers them all together to renew their commitment to God. Joshua makes a speech, to remind them that God has been the one who brought them thus far.

And now, he is calling for them to make a commitment. In remembrance of God’s power to save, anticipating God’s plans for the future with hope, they are being given the hard challenge to say either Yes or No. The Chosen ones are now being told they must make a choice. Why? They have entered the Promised Land. They have seen God’s mighty acts. Now that they are here, will they serve the Lord, or the gods of the Canaanites?

This matters. Conscientious commitment to God is not just for one time and always. It is a daily discipline. And it calls for periodic, even daily, attention. As Joshua reminded them, the choice is before us all - you’ve got to serve somebody. Who are you going to serve?

Bob Dylan once wrote a song about that. He sings:

“You may be a preacher with your spiritual pride  
You may be a city councilman taking bribes on the side  
You may be workin' in a barbershop, you may know how to cut hair  
You may be somebody's mistress, may be somebody's heir

But you're gonna have to serve somebody, yes  
You're gonna have to serve somebody  
Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord  
But you're gonna have to serve somebody

No matter who we are, no matter what we do, we do serve someone or something. But if we lose sight of our thoughts and actions, we could wake up one day and realize we are serving someone or something, other than the Lord. Money. Our Jobs. Our addictions. Our pride. Something often tries to worm its way into our hearts and supplant our commitment to the Lord. But God calls for us to make Him the center of our lives. It’s not a choice between Pert and Head and Shoulders, or Gillette and Bic. Our whole lives ought to be approached, conscientiously centered on serving Lord. Some would call this type of lifestyle choice a type of “mindfulness.” The word “mindfulness” is a throwaway word nowadays, used to apply to all sorts of things. Mindfulness literally means to keep aware at the front of your mind and heart your experience of all things that affect you. Now, none of us are able to know and feel everything at all times. But, mindfulness, like worshipfully serving the Lord, is our way of staying aware of whom we serve and why.

In my time as an ICU chaplain in Albuquerque, sometimes the daily work could be a challenge. You might walk into the middle of an emergency. The importance of remaining peaceful, for others and for oneself, is tantamount. A fellow chaplain showed me something that she does as she travels from room to room. When she leaves one patient, she washes her hands at the door. And as she walks to the next patient room, she makes that handwashing ritual a part of her prayer, leaving that person’s needs in God’s hands. This also spiritually prepares her to meet the next person. Hand washing helps to prevent infection. But she also makes it her focus on serving God mindfully. Perhaps we ought to pray in our cars, as we enter restaurants, and as we enter here and attend meetings, as we continually reaffirm our commitment to serve the Lord.

Daily prayer is a good way to practice our mindful connection to the Lord of all. We might keep a journal. We might draw pictures, or find a regular conversation partner, such as we have with the Exercise, Eat and Pray group. Over the years, the people who come have changed and new people show up. But the core concept is still there. We get exercise, we laugh, we talk after that and most importantly, discuss who we should pray for. Then we do just that.

Prayer is a place of freedom with God, where we can say anything we need and know that God already knows what is on our hearts. Cultivating a growing awareness of whom we serve can open our minds to where God wants us to serve, and to realize that wherever we are, serving those in need, we are serving God.

Assured that God already knows, and has been with us all of the way. Confessing this truism, how can we not commit ourselves to Him? Every now and then, we need to review what we believe and recommit ourselves. Joshua called for the Israelites to recommit themselves to the Lord at Shechem. The covenant was no different from the previous times God made a covenant with them over the generations. Reaffirmations are not just an exercise of nostalgia. They are a chance to bring in the next generation of people who can remember their own experiences under God’s protection. I think that it would also invigorate and revitalize our own sense of investment and commitment to God, inflamed by the power of His Holy Spirit.

So, I have added a couple of different perspectives today to thinking about serving the Lord. The perspectives I am using all have a lot to do with the direction of our reverence and the importance of cultivating our mindfulness towards the Lord. We’ve got to serve somebody. Who’s it going to be? Let us, recommitting our hearts towards the one true God, remembering all that God has done for us, make sure that we dedicate ourselves conscientiously. And, let us do so with wholeheartedness. Going to church, and participating as fully as we can do are ways we can recommit ourselves to serving God, and no other. It is a place where we can remain connected to our God, and learn of ways that God calls us to serve in even greater ways. If we are not serving God, then maybe we are not serving at all. Make that decision today. Let me close with a poem called “Choose This Day” by Rev. Jason Carle, Overland Park Presbyterian Church, Overland Park KS:

## [**poem: choose this day**](https://www.liturgylink.net/2014/10/09/poem-choose-this-day/)

Choosing and choice are hard.  
I first thought this as I looked at row upon row  
of conditioner and shampoo  
after living where I had a choice of  
having one or none-  
Forty to fifty choices!  
What if I choose the wrong one?

“Choose!”, commands Joshua.  
Choose between your liberator,  
or one who has done nothing.  
Choose between false promises of prosperity, rain and good crops  
And freedom.

And I imagine, being an Israelite, being myself,  
seeing gods lined up on the shelf  
like shampoo and conditioners,  
IRAs, pension plans, the “right School” the “right Major”, the right candidate for office, the job, the little gods of everyday life that pull and push me  
and I turn and walk outside  
buying nothing,  
choosing to live as though God has already grabbed me up.  
How can I choose?  
I’ve already been claimed.

Let the chosen make our choice and decide. 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 after church on Sunday, November 8th.**

**Operation Christmas Child boxes are due on Sunday, November 8th.** As per the usual, if you get them to church on Sunday, Rev. Amy will get them turned in to Center Street UMC. There are 6 boxes left. One has your name on it!