**Presbytery of Sierra Blanca**

**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, October 13, 2019**

**Call to Worship**

God calls us to gather together to seek the Shalom of our city  
**We seek God’s Shalom together**  
Where there is separation, may God forge new connections through us  
**We seek God’s wholeness together**  
Where there is violence, may God bring reconciliation through us  
**We seek God’s peace together**  
May the wholeness and peace of God be felt in this community  
**We seek God’s Shalom together. Let us worship God!**

**Prayer of the Day**

Abundant God, we gather around tables to fellowship with those we love.  
Food is what sustains us for the journey ahead  
and we dine with those who you have called to serve with us.  
Help us widen our gaze.  
Inspire us to draw the welcome circle wider.  
Instill within us the truth that your love knows no bounds.  
Gather us this day and forever more in your holy and powerful name. Amen.

**Call to Confession**  
Friends, the invitation list to the Lord’s Table  
is larger than any of us could ever imagine.  
Let us confess the ways in which we have sought to limit that invitation.

**Prayer of Confession**O God, our protector, we take refuge in you;  
**you alone are the source of all our good.  
We seek to be counted among the godly and upright,  
but we confess that we have run after other powers,  
and we have brought trouble upon ourselves and others.**

O Lord, our portion and our cup,  
**you sustain us and lead us in good and pleasant ways.  
We confess that we have trusted in false wisdom  
and set our hearts on short-sighted desires.**

Forgive us, God our life.  
**Help us set you always before us,  
and sustain us in your righteousness.  
Let our hearts be glad, our spirits rejoice,  
and our bodies rest in hope,  
for you do not abandon us to our sin  
or let your chosen ones dwell in the pit.  
In Christ you show us the path of life;  
you welcome us into the joy of your presence;  
you feed us with pleasures forevermore.**

(silence)  **Amen.**

**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 66:1-12**

Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth;

sing the glory of his name;

give to him glorious praise.

**Say to God, "How awesome are your deeds!**

**Because of your great power, your enemies cringe before you.**

All the earth worships you;

they sing praises to you,

sing praises to your name."

**Come and see what God has done:**

**he is awesome in his deeds among mortals.**

He turned the sea into dry land;

they passed through the river on foot.

**There we rejoiced in him,**

**who rules by his might for ever,**

**whose eyes keep watch on the nations-**

**let the rebellious not exalt themselves.**

Bless our God, O peoples,

let the sound of his praise be heard,

who has kept us among the living,

and has not let our feet slip.

**For you, O God, have tested us;**

**you have tried us as silver is tried.**

You brought us into the net;

you laid burdens on our backs;

**you let people ride over our heads;**

**we went through fire and through water;**

**yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.**

**Time out for Teaching: Into a Spacious Place**

**Prayer for Illumination**

O God of wisdom,  
you delight in deep truth.  
Let these words of scripture teach our hearts,  
that we may hear your joy and gladness,  
for the sake of Christ, your wisdom for us. Amen.

**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-7**

1These are the words of the letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the remaining elders among the exiles, and to the priests, the prophets, and all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.

4Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. 7But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

**2 Timothy 2:8-15**

8Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, a descendant of David-that is my gospel, 9for which I suffer hardship, even to the point of being chained like a criminal. But the word of God is not chained. 10Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, so that they may also obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. 11The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; 12if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he will also deny us; 13if we are faithless, he remains faithful-for he cannot deny himself.

14Remind them of this, and warn them before God that they are to avoid wrangling over words, which does no good but only ruins those who are listening. 15Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.

**Sermon: Words to the Wise**

Did you know that our Lord, our Maker, is unchained? God is off the chain. God is free to be God and invites us to a similar freedom.

The 2012 Quentin Tarantino film “Django Unchained” tells the story of a slave, whose freedom was bought by a white man who is trying to catch Brittle Brothers, dangerous bandits. The real Django was a man named Bass Reeves, who was one of the few African slaves who was freed and was given permission to apprehend both black and white people who had broken the law. His last name was given by his former owner, Arkansas state legislator, William Reeves. Eventually, we don’t know exactly how, but Bass Reeves managed to flee his owner and he escaped to Indian territory, where he lived as a fugitive among the Creek, Seminole and Cherokee peoples. When the 13th Amendment was made, freeing the slaves, in 1865, Reeves became a freedman, got married and started a farm in Arkansas. Ten years later, because he was able to speak Native American languages, he was appointed the first black deputy U.S. Marshal to serve west of the Mississippi. Reeves was responsible for catching some of the most dangerous criminals of his time, including his own son, Bennie, who had murdered his own wife.

Quentin Tarantino is known for his amusing yet violent films. I find the story of Bass Reeves even more compelling than Tarantino’s interpretation. Even though Reeves had his hat and belt shot off – in separate incidents – he was never wounded in all his years as a US Marshal. I’ll bet he saw more action than a Tarantino film could hope to show us. He was considered an expert marksman, is credited with 3,000 arrests, and was an accomplished detective too. His fascinating life is a prime example of what a person can do when they have been unchained from slavery.

Unchained, free. Able to go wherever he could to perform his new job, and joyfully no longer owned by another man. Free, to use his superior skills for the good of society.

Now, there is a dichotomy in being both in chains for the gospel and free. For years now, studies are being done – some better than others – on burnout rates of clergy. There have been many disturbing stats over the years, but the good news is they are a little better than we might think. Listen to these from 2016 from [www.churchleadership.org](http://www.churchleadership.org):

79% of Evangelical and Reformed pastors are happier personally

88% of churches are treating their pastors better, too

88% have a high view of Christ

75% are better at their spiritual formation

57% are more satisfied in their calling

However, 54% of pastors still work over 55 hours a week

57% can't pay their bills

54% are overworked and 43% are overstressed

53% feel seminary had not properly prepared them for the task.

35% battle depression

26% are overly fatigued

28% are spiritually undernourished and 9% are burnt-out

23% are still distant to their families

18% work more than 70 hours a week and face unreasonable challenges

3% have had an affair

Yet, 90% feel honored to be a pastor!

But, it’s not just about ministers. I am concerned for the average person in the pew, that is you. And, if you’re concerned about pastor burnout, there is also the concern for church members, our ordinary people living extraordinary lives of faith, freed by the gospel, while also in chains for it, endeavoring to fill the needs of the church and do its ministry. When one of them burns out, they might just quit the church. Each one of us has to care for each other, support one another, and give one another a little space and support. Paul’s letter to Timothy seeks to support Timothy with words of wisdom, both to Timothy, but also for his church.

Paul’s letter to Timothy was to advise Timothy on life, faith and ethics. Timothy was at a church, ministering to the people. It was probably a church he and Paul had founded together. Paul is writing to him from prison. He says he’s in chains for the gospel – a favorite phrase of his. And while he’s in chains, he reminds Timothy of a special kind of freedom that comes from knowing that God is not in chains. God is free and in faith, we too are free. It’s hard to believe sometimes, but it’s true. Hearing such a message of freedom from a guy who is presently in chains is really good news.

It means we are free to do God’s good work, to present ourselves as ones approved by God. For clergy, for elders, and all church members everywhere, we are free to take care of our spirits and hearts. For this is part of it. Final advice from Paul includes – “avoid wrangling over words, for this just ruins those who are listening.” This is very wise advice. For why do we wrangle over words? Maybe it’s a sign of something we should tend to within. The greatest lesson I ever had to learn – and still have to work at – was to say what must be said and then let it rest. We are free to let things rest when we are finished – be it words or deeds. So, together, let’s not be afraid to venture forth, grant one another freedom and support, unafraid to explore where God wants us to go next. Let’s just do what we have to do, say what must be said, and then, let it rest. God is always faithful. Let things rest. Amen.

1. We can be unchained for the gospel.
2. God has been everywhere, and no matter where we go, God has gone before us.
3. Even when we screw something up, God remains faithful, for God cannot deny himself.
4. And then, we are free to present ourselves as one approved by God. For example, to avoid wrangling over words, for this just ruins those who are listening.

**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.