**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, October 18, 2020 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Hymns:**

**BH 483 Sing Praise to God, Who Reigns Above**

**RH 111 O God, Our Help in Ages Past**

**RH 434 Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken**

**Call to Worship (please see bulletin)**

**Prayer of the Day**

**Heavenly Lord, This cool October day we welcome you into our hearts. We sing our praises to you, Mighty God, for you have done marvelous things.**

**Your presence empowers us to perform your amazing acts of lovingkindness, justice and hope. Your power enables us to forgive and receive forgiveness. Your guidance and the example of your son Jesus Christ leads us to fresh springs of hope, hope that in you, anything is possible. Lift our hearts, souls and minds today, to see and to hear again your might acts of salvation. Amen!**

**Call to Confession**

Friends, let us confess the ways that we have failed to live up to God’s bountiful invitation.

**Confession (please see bulletin)**

**Assurance of Forgiveness**

We love the Lord because God has heard our voice and our supplication.  
In the name of Jesus Christ, I announce to you this day: our sins are forgiven!  
**Alleluia! Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 99:1-9 (please see bulletin)**

**Prayers of the People**

We sing to you, O Lord, with all the earth!  
We bless your name because of your saving work every day!  
Make your glory known among all people,  
and share your wondrous works with everyone who calls out to you.  
Reveal your strength and beauty in all things.  
Share your gifts with all creation in your love.

Lord, you set the world firmly in place,  
so nothing can be shaken.  
Work your justice for those who cry out to you;  
heal the skies, the earth, the sea, and everything that lives;  
restore the cities, countries, and peoples of the world;  
and be especially gracious to these we name before you…

Tom Anderson and Jean Corey

Glenda Coles

For our church and its leaders

For Teresa Brake’s daughter, Kathy and her family

For Susie Martinez, that she find transportation and help

For Pat Sieglen, recuperating from surgery

For those anxious about going out in public

For those living in fear of or with COVID

For students, teachers and families

For our leaders local and distant

For the grandson of Ruby Blea

For our dear church members and friends who are alone or who privately suffer from infirmity

For our nation as we vote for what we believe and think

For local business owners and their clientele as we endure changing restrictions on our movements

In silence, we now lift high our prayers to you…

Then all the trees of the forest will shout joyfully,  
when you establish justice  
and redeem your world,  
in Jesus’ name, who taught us to pray, saying…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Presence”**

How do you characterize the relationship between Moses and the Lord?

Here is a short line from a song, that might say something about it:

Oh, why you look so sad, the tears are in your eyes,  
Come on and come to me now, and don't be ashamed to cry,  
Let me see you through, 'cause I've seen the dark side too.  
When the night falls on you, you don't know what to do,  
Nothing you confess could make me love you less…

Today we are about hear a message from Exodus once again. It contains a request from Moses and a promise from the Lord.

Remember last week? We had the story of the golden calf, when the Israelites became anxious again and rebelled by forging their own idol in the form of a calf, from much of the silver and gold that they had brought from Egypt. The Lord was angry, and decided to destroy them, but Moses interceded for them. The Lord changed His mind.

But God was still reticent about helping them and told Moses to take the people to the land flowing with milk and honey. The Lord said He would send an angel to go before them as they traveled into foreign territory, to protect them against those whose land they were entering.

But Moses intercedes again. Moses asks for God to show him the way of the Lord and to consider that the Israelites are a nation of God now, as sinful as they are.

The Lord says “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Moses tells him that if God does not send His presence with them, then he doesn’t want to go any further. But the Lord promises that He shall do just what Moses asks, for Moses has found favor in the Lord’s sight and the Lord knows him by name.

But when Moses asks to see the glory of the Lord, the Lord has something more to say about it. He tells him that as the Lord passes by him, Moses will have to be hidden, for if Moses sees the face of God, meaning his glory, he could die. The Lord says He will hide Moses as He passes by the people, so as to protect him from the glory of the Lord.

The word “presence” is in Hebrew, “panaim.” It is loosely translated as “face” or “countenance.” It can also mean “presence.” This word appears in verses 12-23 seven times!

I find it remarkable to think that the presence of the Lord is the same word root as “face” of the Lord. And that Moses tells the Lord that with the presence of the Lord, the Israelites shall be distinct from every other people on the “face” of the earth.

If God’s presence is the “face” of God, which we cannot see, then what does that say about our own experience of God’s presence? Maybe one could say that God likes to stick his nose into our lives? Maybe. If we ask for God’s presence, it is obviously going to be God’s mind that is with us. I might say, that is God’s most important attribute.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Exodus 33:12-23**

12Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ 13Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” 14He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. 16For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

17The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” 18Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” 19And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” 21And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; 22and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; 23then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

**Gospel Matthew 22:15-22**

15Then the Pharisees went and plotted to entrap him in what he said. 16So they sent their disciples to him, along with the Herodians, saying, “Teacher, we know that you are sincere, and teach the way of God in accordance with truth, and show deference to no one; for you do not regard people with partiality. 17Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor, or not?“ 18But Jesus, aware of their malice, said, “Why are you putting me to the test, you hypocrites? 19Show me the coin used for the tax.” And they brought him a denarius. 20Then he said to them, “Whose head is this, and whose title?” 21They answered, “The emperor’s.” Then he said to them, “Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” 22When they heard this, they were amazed; and they left him and went away.

**Sermon: “The Head of our Hearts” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

Jesus wasn’t too far from the cross, when the Pharisees and King Herod’s henchmen came to Jesus to trap him into saying the wrong thing. The Pharisees were strict, teachers of Jewish Law, viewed by the public as experts in the rules of faith. The Herodians were also Jewish, for King Herod was King of the Jews, a responsibility handed down by his daddy, Herod the Great.

These powerful people were trying to get the best of Jesus, trying to force him to say or do something that would justify an execution, or at the least, a murder. So they put him on the spot, with a seemingly impossible, controversial question: Do we pay taxes to Caesar, or not? It seemed like an either-or question.

Taxes were a sore topic during Jesus’ time. The Jews found paying the poll tax objectionable. Some Jews were considered holy because they refused to look at the emperor’s image on the coin[[1]](#footnote-1). Many believed that paying taxes was offensive, for they believed that only God deserved their gifts. There were two main reasons: the Emperor claimed to be God incarnate, so paying the Emperor was seen as blasphemy. Additionally, the image of the Emperor on the coin was a graven image and was considered taboo. However distasteful taxes were to the Jews, however, they were still dutybound to pay taxes, or they could wind up in prison.

So, with the huge conflict they had over whether to pay the emperor, no wonder these powerful people tried to use the issue to entrap Jesus. They were fishing for a fight. But Jesus tells them to look at the coin and tell Him whose image is on it. Jesus isn’t afraid of an image on a coin. And, Jesus finds a way to answer their question without taking sides on this issue.

He is the Word of God, so no wonder Jesus can see right through his interrogators. He knows that this issue they have brought to him is important, but it has been twisted into something to be used against Him.

Do you ever put the Lord to the test? Maybe we all do. In our prayers, we might push God to do things in our favor, or to make us feel better about our own choices. Less often are we inclined to say, “Have thine own way, Lord. Have thine own way.” The Lord is definitely able to handle whatever you throw His way. But we are more nearsighted and forgetful than the Lord. Sometimes, we think we are serving God, even we have evil intentions, a bit like Jesus’ interrogators in today’s reading. They wanted to entrap him, to put Him to the test. They did not understand him and may have even been a little afraid of Him. Not recognizing Jesus as the Messiah, they may have wanted to destroy Him because they feared he would offend God, and offend the one who would return, the REAL Messiah.

How many times have we feared we would violate the Law of God, when we are put in a position to choose one thing over another? The government that we pay taxes to today is not the same kind as it was in Jesus’ time. However, just like any government, though we pay taxes, we don’t always agree with what it does.

The Barmen Declaration of 1933 speaks a bit to that complex relationship between the Church and the State. In 1932, Adolf Hitler rose to power as chancellor and began to implement stricter controls on the people, notably the Jews, spreading false information about them to turn public opinion against them. All of that is well-documented. The Barmen Declaration spoke against the regime of Hitler, when pastors of the German Evangelical Churches began to see the need to speak prophetically against Hitler’s actions. They were also speaking critically towards those Christians who were without question giving their support to the new chancellor. The Barmen Declaration spoke up about the primacy of Jesus Christ in our lives. He is Lord alone. No one else. He is the pivot point around which we all should live and turn. He is the one around whom we circle, and the one by whom we travel. The star that guides us. The Head of our Hearts. The Barmen Declaration says that no church and no government can domesticate God’s Word, nor can the Church be owned by the state that governs us. Elsewhere in our Book of Confessions, it says, “God alone is Lord of the conscience.” [[2]](#footnote-2),[[3]](#footnote-3)

The famous reggae singer, Bob Marley, born in Jamaica was born to a white British Naval captain, Norval Sinclair Marley and his mom, Cedella, 40 years younger. Marley was a bi-racial child who grew up bullied and called “white boy” by the other kids. His experience as a child, feeling torn between two worlds, caused him to develop an outlook that perhaps could help us today. Torn between black and white, expected by society to take sides, he eventually learned, “I’m not on the white man’s side, or the black man’s side. I’m on God’s side.”[[4]](#footnote-4) We might find ourselves torn between two different choices, and even judged by the world based on our choices. And that pressure could feel enormous to us. Let us remember to choose carefully. Let us choose the apt way to honor God. Let us choose the way that pleases our Lord more.

Jesus confounded and astonished others when He said, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and give to God what belongs to God.” He allowed them to think for themselves and choose. If we think about it, everything we do, all that we have and all that we give belongs to God. Those were perilous times in ancient Israel, and we live in perilous times today. But our focus is on something even bigger than giving to Caesar and what is Caesar’s. Jesus our Lord is our focus. And when we don’t know for sure what is the right choice, God gives us room, as Jesus did with those hypocrites, to try the spirits and see what is truly of God’s Word. So, we do not have to fear what we will learn when we ask questions. Instead, let us again dedicate ourselves to the practice of allowing Him to be Lord of our conscience, and - the Head of our Hearts. 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.

**Daylight Savings Time ends soon!** Mark your calendars on October 31st to “fall back” one hour. Maybe a good nap on Saturday is in order too.

**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!

**Sample Ballots are available.** If you would like to read up on your election choices we also have a couple of booklets left too. Check the Narthex chair for a copy of your own.

1. As Rabbi Nahum ben Simlai did, according to The Rabbinic Commentary of the New Testament, by Rabbi Samuel Lachs. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. According to [www.remember.org](http://www.remember.org): “Hitler induced a confused and frightened Hindenburg to sign a decree euphemistically called, “For the Protection of the People and State,” suspending all of the basic rights of citizens and imposing the death sentence for arson, sabotage, resistance to the decree, and disturbances to public order. Arrests could be made on suspicion, and people could be sentenced to prison without trial or the right of counsel. The suspension was never lifted throughout the entire period of Nazi rule, and the decree of February 28th destroyed fundamental guarantees under the Weimar democracy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “God Is Lord of the Conscience a. That “God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men2 which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship.”3 b. Therefore we consider the rights of private judgment, in all matters that respect religion, as universal and unalienable: We do not even wish to see any religious constitution aided by the civil power, further than may be necessary for protection and security, and at the same time, be equal and common to all others. PCUSA Book of Order 2019-2021, F-3.0101. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.biography.com/news/bob-marley-biography-facts [↑](#footnote-ref-4)