**Presbytery of Sierra Blanca**

**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Sunday, October 20, 2019 29th 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 (call to worship)**

**Prayer of the Day**

God of Light and Love,  
help us this day to worship you  
with all of our hearts, minds, and bodies.  
Shower us with the grace of your Spirit  
that we might joyfully receive  
the message you have for us today. **Amen**.

**Call to Confession (call to worship)**

**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 119:97-104 (call to worship)**

**Prayers of the People**

Lord, you gather us into your dwelling  
and lift us up into your holy presence.  
Make us worthy of you  
and teach us always to do what is right,  
as we pray for your people.

We pray for our friends and neighbors,  
who are near to us  
physically and in our affections.  
We pray especially for those we have named before you…

We pray too for our enemies,  
whose behavior we reject,  
with whom you call us to be reconciled.  
Give us grace to repent of our sins against others;  
fortitude to keep our promise even when it hurts;  
generosity to create abundance through sharing with those in need.

Keep us from stumbling as we follow in your way,  
we pray in Jesus’ name, saying together:

**Time out for Teaching: Loving the Truth**

This morning’s Psalm is from the longest Psalm in the Bible. It is Psalm 119, a Psalm dedicated to praising the Law of God.

First, let me say something about the Law. To our ears, the “Law” sounds like something you fight and lose. “I fought the law and the law won!”

But to the Israelites, the Law was God’s gift to them. It assured them of God’s providence for Israel always. It promised them that God had a special place for them in the world, by creating a fence around them, preserving them as “a priestly kingdom, a holy nation” (Ex 19:6). This was God’s way of telling them that they had a special reason for existence, that they maintained a personal and national identity as God’s own children, elected to be the crucible for the coming Messiah.

The Law of God began with what – in Exodus? The Ten Commandments.

But contained within the “Law” in the Old Testament we have the first 5 books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. The greater Law of God, therefore, isn’t just all the do’s and don’ts of God. The greater Law of God contains all the stories and sayings, blessings and curses, genealogies and yes, the 613 do’s and don’ts. To love the Law of God is to love God’s truths made evident in the 5 books, and it’s worth writing a long song about them.

**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.

**Jeremiah 31:27-34**

27The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will sow the house of Israel and the house of Judah with the seed of humans and the seed of animals. 28And just as I have watched over them to pluck up and break down, to overthrow, destroy, and bring evil, so I will watch over them to build and to plant, says the LORD. 29In those days they shall no longer say: "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge." 30But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge.

31The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt-a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 33But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

**2 Timothy 3:14-4:5**

14But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, 15and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

1In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: 2proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. 3For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, 4and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. 5As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

**Luke 18:1-8**

1Then Jesus told them a parable about their need to pray always and not to lose heart. 2He said, "In a certain city there was a judge who neither feared God nor had respect for people. 3In that city there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, 'Grant me justice against my opponent.' 4For a while he refused; but later he said to himself, 'Though I have no fear of God and no respect for anyone, 5yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will grant her justice, so that she may not wear me out by continually coming.'" 6And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?"

**Sermon: Prayer Whisperers**

This morning’s Call to Worship was written by Rev. Lucus Keppel, a pastor in Bixby, Oklahoma. It begins with “We are called to struggle together, to turn every breath into a prayer to God.”

It is accurate, isn’t? When we worship together, we pray together. But sometimes managing to squeak out a prayer can be a struggle. I remember one day in seminary when I was feeling particularly terrible. I was sad about something and afraid – I can’t even remember what it was now! – and sitting in chapel that day, I felt like I was just going through the motions, that is until we arrived at the time of prayer. I remember feeling so pent up with emotion, that I couldn’t even say the Lord’s Prayer in unison with the others. It was a struggle with prayer, for I was so overwhelmed I was unable to speak without tears. So, I let go and fell silent, while everyone else prayed those words. And I told myself it was okay, for listening to them, my heart became full of the words. And as the words washed over me, I was a part of the prayer. I was a part of the struggle, but allowed the others to carry the prayer. We struggle together, to pray with every breath.

Sometimes we don’t know what to say in a prayer, or we wonder if we are praying correctly. Some people say, “If you didn’t get what you want, then you’re not praying hard enough,” or “you’re not praying correctly.” Or we’re told we’re not praying often, for we think when Paul the Apostle said, “pray constantly,” we think we are supposed to be talking constantly. I think these interpretations do not give our Creator enough credit, for our God understands our prayers even better than we understand ourselves. God understands everything we have to say in prayer, whether we take a moment or a day. It has a lot to do with our intention and approach in prayer.

Jesus speaks to us about prayer, as we pray persistently and as we pray for God’s will to be done. He isn’t talking about consistency in prayer, that is, whether our prayers are “correctly done.” Instead, he’s speaking of persistence in prayer. He calls for us to be persistent in prayer, particularly in our call for God’s help. Persistent is different from “consistent.” While ***consistent*** means unchanging or constant, no matter what the circumstances, ***persistent*** means to carry on a task no matter what happens, and being willing to adapt, faithfully and patiently. In Jesus’ parable of the woman with the judge, this woman was persistent in her cry for justice. She doesn’t give up on that irritable judge.

The only reason that judge would listen, was that she is persistent. Every day, even though life brings different joys and problems, this woman takes each day as a new opportunity to plead her case each day. Finally, she wears him down, so she will finally leave him alone.

This is an odd parable, for if we think of ourselves as that woman, and we think of that judge as God in this story, then it makes God see less compassionate than our hearts confess. But this parable uses a form of Rabbinical logic, found elsewhere in Jesus’ teachings: If a human judge is willing to eventually listen to us, how much more willing our God is to listen! For we already knowledge that God is more righteous than any human judge. God is shown as more righteous by Jesus Christ’s own blood, a bridge God built for us to we cross, an assurance we have of forgiveness and grace.

Unlike that human judge, God wants to hear from us. God cannot grow tired. My mother used to have a hand-stitched pillow in her sewing room which said, “Before you go to bed, give all your problems to God. God will be up all night anyway.” God’s heart is gladdened to receive us in prayer. Unlike that human judge, God promises to never hide from us, if we are persistent and patient.

Persistence and Patience go hand in hand with all else we do, and maybe even can become our way of “praying constantly” as Paul teaches us. Prayer, just like everything else, has a lot to do with our approach and attitude. Persistence and Patience.

I recently downloaded an audio book by the Cesar Millan, also known as The Dog Whisperer. Millan, famous for his seemingly-magical ability to communicate with dogs, with little to no words, demonstrates that every dog owner can become leader of the pack. It takes understanding how the dog sees the world, and a peaceful patience. Every day the dog needs direction and discipline, no matter what the circumstances. Millan teaches that the way for the dog to trust you as he leader, you have to come from a place of peace, and a willingness to be persistent. Yelling commands are no longer needed. A strong, centered and peaceful presence, confident.

For example, whenever Russell and I get ready to leave the house, we carve out a moment to talk calmly to our dogs. They’re not quite ready for the whispers, but this process of leaving the house doesn’t long. It’s a ritual we are following to stop for a moment, take a deep breath, redirect our energies, and show the dogs that everyone’s at peace. Dogs understand that better than human words. Cesar Millan teaches that when we are pent up with anxieties, stressed out about what we have to go and do next, we pass it on to our pets, and they are less able to understand our commands. Millan makes it look easy, like it’s a Jedi mind trick, or magic. But it is all about how we humans regulate ourselves when we are stressed. And when we learn that, whether we have dogs or cats or hamsters or fish, we can become better humans, committed to patient and peace. A commitment that only works because of patience and persistence.

This commitment is what it takes to patient persistence with prayer. Jesus teaches us to never give up hope. Patience and persistence is an approach we can work with, for it can help us in changing circumstances. Just making time for prayer is a struggle enough, but even 5 minutes is worth our while, for it can give us daily peace, that we may only need to whisper our prayers, or fall silent, or have the courage to cry out. God sees our struggles and rewards those who are committed to prayer, imperfect as we are. The good news is, we can approach our God, for God is greater, more compassionate and righteous than any judge on earth. Thanks to our God for bridging the gap and making a way for us between our prayers and heaven. 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.

**Potluck Fellowship Dinner** is after church today. Please stay after and if you’re a visitor, we want to get to know you better!

**Dutch Treat Dames** meet this Wednesday at noon. Let’s meet at Del’s again and enjoy a little fellowship.

**Halloween/All Saints Party November 1st:** Mark your calendars for our Halloween Party on Friday, November 1st. Have a cool Halloween costume? Now you can wear it a second time. We start gathering for fun around 5:30PM. Please bring a snacky food item to share with the party. Time for fun!