**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**September 5, 2021 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

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

**RH 447 Let Us Break Bread Together**

**BH 322 Spirit of the Living God (Prayer for Illumination)**

**RH 446 Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread (responsive Communion Hymn)**

**Green Book - Stepping in the Light**

**Call to Worship**

Friends, be strong and do not fear, for we are in the presence of God.
**Waters shall break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert.**
The burning sand shall become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water.
**God brings forth abundance where before there was scarcity.**
There is nothing that is impossible with God.
**We are gathered to share God’s blessings with one another.**
**Come, let us worship God.**

**Opening Prayer**

God of grace: you have given us minds to know you, hearts to love you, and voices to sing your praise. Fill us with your Holy Spirit, so we may celebrate your glory and truly worship you, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

The proof of God’s amazing love is this: while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Because we have faith in him, we dare with confidence to approach God. Let us as God to forgive us.

**Prayer of Confession**

**Almighty God: you love us, but we have not loved you; you call, but we have not listened. We walk away from neighbors in need, wrapped up in our own concerns. We have gone along with evil, with prejudice, warfare and greed. God our Parent, help us to face up to ourselves, so that, as you move toward us in mercy, we may repent, turn to you and receive forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**  ~silence~

Gracious God,
**speak into our wilderness again, that we may learn to be your people. Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**

Hear the good news! This statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted: Christ Jesus entered the world to rescue sinners. He personally bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might be dead to sin and be alive to all that is good.

Friends, Believe the good news of the Gospel.

**In Jesus Christ we are forgiven.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**\*Gloria Patri**

 **Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end, Amen, Amen.**

**Psalm 125:1-5**

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,

which cannot be moved, but abides forever.

**As the mountains surround Jerusalem,**

**so the LORD surrounds his people,**

**from this time on and forevermore.**

For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest

on the land allotted to the righteous,

so that the righteous might not stretch out

their hands to do wrong.

**Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,**

**and to those who are upright in their hearts.**

But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways

the LORD will lead away with evildoers.

**Peace be upon Israel!**

**Offering**

**Prayer for Illumination BH 322 Spirit of the Living God**

**Time out for Teaching: Elements of Christian Worship – Art and Architecture**

 What does art in worship do for us?

 I am speaking more specifically of the visual arts today. Music, while also art, rather deserves its own discussion. But as we look around the sanctuary today, what do you see that you would consider “art?”

 Most obviously, we see the stained glass window, which was featured recently in the August-September edition of **Guideposts** magazine. Having the chance to boast about you the church, our mission to stranded travelers and to talk about the history of this beautiful window was one of the very few joys I was feeling this past spring. I hardly remember it, since is was just a couple of weeks after losing Russell, but I am so glad they called and asked to interview me.

 What does this stained glass window do for you in your worship here?

 I think that whatever artwork we have in this sanctuary should always evoke a sense of worship, wonder, awe, meditation, enthusiasm, or other God-centered feelings. I would ask myself if the artist was worshiping God with the art. There are a lot of artists who make art for their own benefit, or to even further their careers – after all, that is their profession. But the art we have in a worship space is solely for the glorification of God.

 In the church of my youth, we didn’t have any stained glass windows. Our sanctuary had cinder block walls, plain yet curvaceous natural wood furnishings, and movable seating, so we could arrange the seating for a variety of different occasions, all facing forward, or in a square to face each other. It was built in the late 70s, I think. We didn’t have stained glass because the church wanted to see the world outside – which was a dense forest in the summer. They believed that God wanted them to see outside, so the outside view became part of their “art.”

How does art help you worship God? I like to remember, as I create art or appreciate someone else’s, that we are created in God’s image, and God is our Creator. Art may be seen as a celebrate of that truth.

**Second Reading James 2:1-17**

1My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? 2For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, 3and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, "Have a seat here, please," while to the one who is poor you say, "Stand there," or, "Sit at my feet," 4have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? 5Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters. Has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him? 6But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who oppress you? Is it not they who drag you into court? 7Is it not they who blaspheme the excellent name that was invoked over you?

8You do well if you really fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 9But if you show partiality, you commit sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. 10For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11For the one who said, 'You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." Now if you do not commit adultery but if you murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. 12So speak and so act as those who are to be judged by the law of liberty. 13For judgment will be without mercy to anyone who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment.

14What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

**Gospel Mark 7:24-37**

24From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice, 25but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet. 26Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophoenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. 27He said to her, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." 28But she answered him, "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." 29Then he said to her, "For saying that, you may go — the demon has left your daughter." 30So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.

31Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis. 32They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him. 33He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue. 34Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, "Ephphatha," that is, "Be opened." 35And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly. 36Then Jesus ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it. 37They were astounded beyond measure, saying, "He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak."

**Sermon “Mercy Rules” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

The French philosopher and author, Voltaire once said, “Present opportunities are not to be neglected; they rarely visit us twice.” I think Voltaire is right. From another point of view, every day, you might say, we awake as new people. We awake the same personality, the same genetics, the same past history. But every day is a new one, filled with opportunities.

Did you know: The human body has almost completely regenerated itself every 7-10 years? Your body’s cells die and regenerate. Some parts of us regenerate every few days. Using carbon-14 dating, Dr. Jonas Frisen, a Swedish molecular biologist, was able to study our body tissue and see how old our body cells are. Our skin regenerates about every 2-4 weeks. Red blood cells, about 4 months. The liver – between 150-500 days, which is quite astonishing. Our stomach lining, just about 5 days. I would imagine New Mexicans might require even less than that, depending on our green chile intake! Some of our brain cells however, especially the part we call the “lizard brain” (parts that help us breathe, and other unconscious activities) never really regenerate, but stay around from birth to death. Brings a new perspective on that line of Scripture: “Anyone who is in Christ is a new creation!”

So, periodically we become new creatures, literally. And simultaneously, new opportunities also come along. If we are renewed, in various ways, on a regular basis, why not also see each sunrise as a new opportunity – a chance to be better people and do God’s will?

Jesus takes new opportunities for mercy and healing as he travels through Gentile territories north and east of Israel. Instead of adhering to the traditional Jewish purity laws, Jesus chooses to show mercy to Gentiles. Mercy to the Syrophoenician woman whose daughter was dying, and mercy to the man who was unable to hear or speak. Jesus broke the “rules” for mercy, perhaps because it was an opportunity for those people to be healed and then know of God’s mercy for them. The Gentiles did not yet know that the Jewish God of Israel had come also to save them.

It was a chance to show mercy to someone who might not have known it otherwise. The Syrophoenician woman for instance must have had no one else in her life to help her. Women in the ancient world rarely approached men they didn’t know, because it was considered socially inappropriate. And, it was assumed that they do not go about in public without a male escort from their family – a husband or a son, or other. By the sheer fact that she approached Jesus for help tells me that she had no one else to turn to, and she was willing to break social expectations and talk to him. He does the same by responding to her. And this woman gives him a good argument as to why he should help her. He helps her. He doesn’t have to even see the little girl in order to save her.

I keep on wracking my brain as to why Jesus would go over there to those awful Gentiles. Jesus must have known that people would seek his help if he went there. All I can think of is the logic of the Syrophoenician woman, who is able to argue with Jesus…Who basically made the point that all of the Gentiles who wait on God may receive even a few crumbs of mercy. She argued on behalf of Gentiles everywhere. Jesus did not waste too much time, but took the chance, for it might not come again in just the same way.

What is so curious to me is that Jesus’ healings to the Gentiles are a very important part of his ministry. He seemed to intentionally travel to both areas, and was willing to heal Gentiles, even by touching them with his hands. His second healing story in our reading today is one he did by touch, despite the guy’s heritage. He spat, and touched the man on the eyes. He spoke a phrase that to the Gentiles probably worked a little like – “Abra cadabra!” His techniques were familiar to them, but they worked. And it seemed in part because it was so urgent and necessary. An opportunity that was just in time with what the people needed to see.

How do we perceive those who come along in need of mercy? Do we argue with them, and avoid? Do we see it as an opportunity that may never come along again? Granted, we sometimes wonder if giving someone what they want is really good for them. Sometimes it isn’t good for them. But when called upon to be agents of healing, we have a sacred opportunity, not just to help someone, but to also send a clear message that God is merciful and loving.

Life is full of missed opportunities and unrealized dreams. But God gives us so much more to hope for, and to be hope for the world. James reminds us today to remember those who are hungry and in need of help. They are always there, and we have a sacred duty to feed them. You and I have such resources. You have pooled together foods for a pantry. You have organized a fund that I can use to help other people. A few of you have donated gift cards to local restaurants to help out the hungry and stranded people who come to our church. I have been the person who hands out that help, assisting people with hotel rooms and filling up gas tanks. We are a Route 66 church. We have our mission. This place is our mission field. With every sunrise, is the opportunity to be better people than yesterday. Let’s not forsake our mission, nor the opportunities to show God’s mercy. In a world full of suffering, let us embrace the call: to show mercy, and thereby hope. Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

**Great 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 your greatness, O Lord,
and our spirits rejoice in you, our Savior.
You looked with favor on your unlikely servant Mary,
and she delivered a blessing for all generations.
You, the Almighty, have done great things, and your name is ever holy.

From the depth of your compassion,
you gave life to Jesus, your Son,
who came to show mercy on those who need you most,
from generation to generation.
His perfect love showed your strength,
and his humility made the proud stumble.
His death cast down from their thrones the powers of death,
and his resurrection lifted humanity up from the lowliness of the grave.

Come upon us now with your Holy Spirit,
and let your power overshadow this meal, O Most High.
As we share this bread and cup,
fill us with the life of Jesus Christ.
May we bear him into the world once again,
so that we may empty ourselves of unjust wealth
and fill the hungry with good things.

Make us your servant people,
signs of your promise of mercy,
in the name of the coming Christ.
We pray in his name, saying…

*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Words of Institution**

**Receiving the Body “Thanks be to God!”**  Verse 1 of RH 446 Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread

**Receiving the Cup “Thanks be to God!”** Verse 2 of RH 446

**Prayer After Communion**

God of glory, in this holy meal
you show us your will for every meal.
In Christ’s strength, let us live and work
for the day when all tables are filled with your abundance
and surrounded by your people in peace.
In Jesus’ name. Amen.

**\*Benediction**

**Prayer Requests:**

Amy (Glenna Gray’s daughter) chronic medical issues
Betty (Alzheimer’s) and Dolores (paralyzed) – Glenda’s sisters
Bubba (Glenda’s grandson) – COVID

Cheryl Holland – grief for husband

Cheryl – a recent church visitor, requesting God’s help and strength in faith

Dorothy Randals – at Autumn Blessings, for strength and comfort
Family of Elmer Anderson in their grief (Tom’s last living brother)

Elmer Schuster - leg pain, final dental surgery
Fay Birch – stage 4 cancer, prayers for her husband, Larry too
Glenda Coles – torn right rotator cuff and bicep, getting an MRI on 9/7
Jenna Morris – injured knee, getting MRI in a few weeks

Dr. Jean Corey – seeking employees
Lissa – Glenda’s granddaughter (high risk pregnancy)
Lucy Jasper – Alzheimers/Dementia
Lynn Hawkins – she may have found a new home closer to her doctor
Pat Sieglen – health and strength; please pray she can go home

People seeking jobs, and people seeking employees

Ralph Moya – hospitalized for COVID in Clovis

Ruth Johnson – for general health
Schools, students, teachers and families

Sharon and Wayne Huffman – general health
Shay – Julie Sursa’s daughter
Susie – still seeking a car, planning for EMS school
Tammy Lucero –treatment for cancer

Tate Pospichal – torn ACL, knee surgery

Travelers
All those suffering from COVID19

**Announcements:**

**PW Meeting:** Trying to get “back on track,” Amy is calling together a PW meeting for Saturday, September 11 at 11:00AM. There isn’t the need for lunch or anything. We hope to be done by about noon.

**Ruling Elders:**  Our next Session will be one week from today, after church.

**Today is Communion Sunday!**