**First Presbyterian Church, Tucumcari**

*The Church With the Holy Spirit Window*

**Sunday, September 6, 2020 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

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

**Hymns:**

**RH 399 Love Divine, All Love’s Excelling**

**BH 357 O Master, Let Me Walk With Thee**

**RH 21 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee**

**Call to Worship**

Come, children of God, and be welcomed here as you are.  
**We gather in this place to worship God and God alone.**  
Come, children of God, and be fed at the Lord’s Table.  
**We come to receive what we need for the journey ahead.**  
Come, children of God, and let us find the fuel for our faith.  
**We come to the Table to receive God’s blessing and share it with others.**  
Come, let us worship God.

**Prayer of the Day**

God of resurrection power,  
you called your Son out of the tomb  
and in so doing, called the whole creation into new life.  
Even now, you call us to join your way of resurrection,  
you lift our eyes and raise our hearts,  
you transform our minds and renew our spirits.  
Bring us once again into awareness of your presence,  
that we may offer you our worship,  
and be nourished for your kingdom’s work.  
We pray in the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

**Call to Confession**

**Prayer of Confession**

**God of justice, in baptism you anointed us to live boldly in the reality of your coming kingdom. We confess that we have not fulfilled our calling. We have not used your power to serve our neighbors. We have walked away from oppression and injustice. We have turned our backs on your beloved children who hunger and thirst in a world of plenty. Forgive us, Lord. Make us courageous servants of your justice, peace, and wholeness, in Jesus’ name.** ~silence~ Amen.

Through God’s grace we are washed and forgiven.  
**Thanks be to God! Hallelujah! Amen.**

The peace of the Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**Psalm 149:1-9**

Praise the Lord!  
**Sing to the Lord a new song,  
his praise in the assembly of the faithful.**Let Israel be glad in its Maker;  
let the children of Zion rejoice in their King.  
**Let them praise his name with dancing,  
making melody to him with tambourine and lyre.**For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;  
he adorns the humble with victory.  
**Let the faithful exult in glory;  
let them sing for joy on their couches.**Let the high praises of God be in their throats  
and two-edged swords in their hands,  
**to execute vengeance on the nations  
and punishment on the peoples,**to bind their kings with fetters  
and their nobles with chains of iron,  
to execute on them the judgment decreed.  
**This is glory for all his faithful ones.  
Praise the Lord!**

**Presentation of Offering and Offertory**

**Time out for Teaching: “Scapegoats”**

What is a “scapegoat?” In today’s reading in Exodus, we are now told of the story of the first Passover. Moses and Aaron are still in the land of Egypt. By this time they have also teamed up with Miriam, Aaron’s sister. Remember that Moses was born to Levite parents and Aaron and Miriam are also of the Levite clan.

They are still seeking God’s salvation from the Egyptian Pharaoh, that evil Pharaoh, who wished to destroy the Israelites/Hebrews. The Pharaoh has refused the call to “Let my people go!” God calls forth 9 plagues upon Egypt because of the Pharaoh’s stiff-necked refusals and each time the Pharaoh remains unmoved, despite the suffering of his own Egyptian people as a result of those plagues.

And so, God sends the last plague, the angel of death, to destroy the first born baby boys of Egypt. This to me seems a little like a reminder to the Pharaoh’s own injunction, when Moses was firstborn. Do you remember what that was? (it was when the Pharaoh was a new king there who did not remember Joseph, and became fearful/paranoid about the existence of that strong breed of people called “Hebrews” and announced that all baby Hebrew boys should be killed at birth.) Surely the Pharaoh also knew the significance of this plague.

In our reading which we will hear in a moment, we hear the instructions from the Lord, given to the Israelites about how to avoid this plague. And it involves the death of a lamb for every household, or every couple of households. It specifically says that if your home is too small to have your own lamb, share it with another home. It seems to imply that nothing should go to waste.

But even more interestingly, the Israelites are told that they should keep their loins girded and ready for action. They need to take all of these steps, from slaughtering the lamb and dressing it, to cooking and eating it, and then what to do with the blood. Place the blood on the lintel of your door, which is the support beam which goes above your front doorway. This will stand out for the angel of death so that as it passes through it will know that this is a household who believes in the Lord and the Lord shall choose to save this family. They are to do it dressed and ready to leave their homes, wearing their sandals and overclothes. They are to pack up the bread dough they have, even before it is ready to rise, so that they are ready to leave at a moment’s notice and will have some food to take with them. Hence, the festival of unleavened bread.

The Israelites are roused from the middle of the night and were, we are told in chapter 12, forced to leave Egypt. It’s a good thing they were warned to be prepared to leave.

This is the story upon which we are taught “Let this be an ordinance for you to keep…”

So what did the lamb do for the people? It was a “scapegoat.”

In future Temple worship, the Levites (priesthood) would sacrifice animals for various purposes. The lamb was the sacrifice to carry the sins of the people. 1 lamb to sacrifice and the other lamb would be kept alive in order to wear the other’s blood and carry it away into the landscape.

**Prayer for Illumination**

**Exodus 12:1-14**

1The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt: 2This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. 3Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household. 4If a household is too small for a whole lamb, it shall join its closest neighbor in obtaining one; the lamb shall be divided in proportion to the number of people who eat of it. 5Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. 6You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. 7They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. 8They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. 9Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted over the fire, with its head, legs, and inner organs. 10You shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. 11This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the passover of the LORD. 12For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human beings and animals; on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. 13The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

14This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

**Matthew 18:15-20**

15“If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. 16But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. 17If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

**Sermon: “Two to Tangle, Many to Heal” Rev. Amy Pospichal**

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” Jesus tells us this very clearly. He is not generalizing about the numbers. Neither does He mean that if you are all by yourself, that He is not with you.

We like to fall back on that phrase as a way of justifying our small-sized gatherings. It sure is a comfort to know that even if there are just two people gathered in the name of Jesus, then we’re all right. For God is present among us, even if there is just two of us.

That’s okay. If there are just three people here for a game night. Four people here to exercise together. Six people to meet and form a Board of Deacons or a Session of Elders. 10% of our church membership (that’s about 3.2 people) to vote officially at a Congregational Meeting. We say, “It only takes two or three gathered in His name to discover Jesus is with us.” For even in the smallest of gatherings, if we just open our hearts, we find out that God is at work among us and through us.

But there is a very particular work of God that Jesus is discussing in our reading today. For it is a very specific situation of which Jesus speaks, other than simply justifying our little group’s existence. That work of God is the work of reconciliation within the Body of Christ. Jesus’ speech in Matthew 18 is to discuss how to heal conflict when the Body of Christ is broken by our sins against each other. Matthew’s gospel is not just meant to comfort us when we are feeling small. It is to equip us and challenge us to do the harder and nobler thing – to keep the strength and integrity of this house of God, Christ’s Body.

The integrity of this Body of Christ may be found in us, the members, as we work towards the care of one another and seek unity with each other. Matthew 18 reminds us that we hang together in His name, because of His power to unite us. And because of our calling to be one in Him, we demonstrate it by seeking forgiveness with each other. There is no question that we sometimes hurt one another. It is just a side effect of being in community. But the very power of Christ’s message is demonstrated in our commitment to remain in community. And that calls for the living Body of Christ, to take the courageous step, of doing that of which Jesus speaks. Reconciliation.

It's much easier to just live with the tangles and never bother mending them. For the longer we go in the life, the easier it is to avoid fixing problems and keep to ourselves. After two or more tangle together, it could call for the whole community of faith to help heal the body. No one can go it completely alone when we are members of the Body of Christ. Jesus describes what to do if you cannot reconcile with your brother or sister. If a one-on-one conversation does not help the healing, then, Jesus instructs us to go to certain people in the congregation for mediation – a couple of elders perhaps. And, if no satisfaction can be achieved, they may take it to the next level, and seek healing with the help of the whole congregation.

It takes two to tangle, but sometimes we need help, which is why Jesus offers these instructions to seek the help of the church to disentangle us. And it is urgently needed because sometimes when we leave things alone, they will return in a worse way. There is an expression: “Things that go away by themselves come back by themselves.” Meaning – there are some things we can pretend will go away eventually, but they rarely ever do. So it can go when we fail to find forgiveness with each other. So there is a way, says Jesus, to heal up, so we can move forward, free.

Matthew offers a step by step approach to mending fences. He says that if someone has offended you within the fellowship of the congregation, then begin with going to that person yourself privately. This is probably one of the hardest things in the world. Just like any living being – ourselves, our pets, our fellow humans … – the Body of Christ also needs to be refreshed and renewed by our activities of forgiveness – a sharing of grace.

Frederich Buechner, a contemporary theologian, said the following about forgiveness:

“To forgive somebody is to say one way or another, ‘You have done something unspeakable, and by all rights I should call it quits between us. Both my pride and my principles demand no less. However, although I make no guarantees that I will be able to forget what you’ve done and though we may both carry the scars for life, I refuse to let it stand between us. I still want you for my friend.’

“To accept forgiveness means to admit that you’ve done something unspeakable that needs to be forgiven, and thus both parties must swallow the same thing: their pride.

“This seems to explain what Jesus means when he says to God, ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ …What Jesus apparently is saying is that the pride which keeps us from forgiving is the same pride which keeps us from accepting forgiveness, and will God please help us do something about it.

“When somebody you’ve wronged forgives you, you’re spared the dull and self-diminishing throb of a guilty conscience. When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you’re spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride. For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other’s presence.”

Although he is a bit poetic about forgiveness, he is correct. When the process of reconciliation happens, there can finally be healing on both sides. It can take two to tangle but it can call for all of us, with the presence of God, to bring healing. Thanks be to God that we get to be a part of his great salvation story! Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

This is not my table.  
This is not our church’s table.  
This is not our denomination’s table,  
or an American table,  
or a table reserved for the wealthy or well-connected.  
This table is reserved for sinners,  
for the poor,  
for those who are cast out,  
for those who hunger and thirst.  
This table is reserved for all the baptized.  
This table belongs to Jesus Christ.  
Come.

**Great Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with You.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them unto the Lord**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We praise and thank you, Lord,  
because you do wonderful things.  
In Jesus Christ, you make your salvation known  
for all people,  
completing the faithfulness you promised  
to the house of Israel,  
which you remember still.

Through these gifts of bread and cup,  
we join all the earth in praising you.  
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us  
as we share in this meal.  
As you feed us,  
make us instruments of your praise  
and servants of your faithfulness.

Keep us faithful in Christ’s service  
until he comes at long last to establish justice and plenty on the earth.  
We pray with and for all people,  
joining in the prayer Christ taught, saying…  
*The Lord’s Prayer*

**Distribution of Elements**

**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.

**THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH**

**Session Meeting next Sunday:** Please remember, Elders, that we have a meeting right after worship Sunday, September 13th.

**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.

**Church Lockdown Continues.** Friends, please be mindful that the Fellowship Hall side of our building is still locked down until September 7th.

**Alternatives to Church Events** – Anyone who would like to meet for a meal outside at a local restaurant, or gather at someone’s home for fellowship, or go for a walk together, please call the pastor at 575-708-0860. Other suggestions for how we can still fellowship with each other, are welcome.

## **Watershed**

[Indigo Girls](https://www.google.com/search?sxsrf=ALeKk03olwuhobUN7CivLmLpbyglyd7Ztw:1597784601063&q=Indigo+Girls&stick=H4sIAAAAAAAAAONgVuLUz9U3MDTLMs5exMrjmZeSmZ6v4J5ZlFMMADjdNUMcAAAA&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjDqMu806XrAhWNPM0KHb68AtcQMTAAegQIDRAF)

Thought I knew my mind  
Like the back of my hand  
The gold and the rainbow  
But nothing panned out as I planned  
And they say only milk and honey's  
Gonna make your soul satisfied  
Well I better learn how to swim  
'Cause the crossing is chilly and wide

Twisted guardrails on the highway  
Broken glass on the cement  
A ghost of someone's tragedy  
How recklessly my time has been spent  
They say that it's never too late  
But you don't, you don't get any younger  
Well I better learn how to starve the emptiness  
And feed the hunger

Up on the watershed  
Standing at the fork in the road  
You can stand there and agonize  
'Til your agony's your heaviest load  
You'll never fly as the crow flies  
Get used to a country mile  
When you're learning to face  
The path at your pace  
Every choice is worth your while

And there's always retrospect (when you're looking back)  
To light a clearer path  
Every five years or so I look back on my life  
And I have a good laugh  
You start at the top (start at the top)  
Go full circle round  
Catch a breeze  
Take a spill  
But ending up where I started again  
Makes me want to stand still

Up on the watershed  
Standing at the fork in the road  
You can stand there and agonize  
'Til your agony's your heaviest load  
You'll never fly as the crow flies  
Get used to a country mile  
When you're learning to face  
The path at your pace  
Every choice is worth your while

Stepping on a crack (stepping on a crack)  
Breaking up and looking back  
'Til every tree limb overhead just seems to sit and wait  
'Til every step you take becomes a twist of fate (twist of fate)

Up on the watershed  
Standing at the fork in the road  
You can stand there and agonize  
'Til your agony's your heaviest load  
You'll never fly as the crow flies  
Get used to a country mile  
When you're learning to face  
The path at your pace  
Every choice is worth your while

Up on the watershed  
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You can stand there and agonize  
'Til your agony's your heaviest load  
You'll never fly as the crow flies  
Get used to a country mile  
When you're learning to face  
The path at your pace  
Every choice is worth your while

And when you're learning to face  
The path at your pace  
Every choice is worth your while

Lyrics by Emily Ann Saliers

Definition of Watershed

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/watershed#:~:text=A%20watershed%20is%20a%20turning,is%20a%20geographical%20term%2C%20originally.&text=It's%20from%20this%20meaning%20that,dividing%20line%20in%20social%20life.>