**First Presbyterian Church Tucumcari**

**Worship 11:00AM**

**Sunday, September 9, 2018, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**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.

**Prayer of the Day**

God of grace,

We are thankful to you for each day we live

And each day we live is a chance to glorify you.

Place within us a renewed heart for your worship

And for living the life that Jesus shows us,

So in our living, Jesus the Christ is revealed.

In His name we pray, Amen.

**Call to Confession**Let us gather to lament what is broken in our lives and ask God to forgive us.

**Confession  
Your word reminds us that we are called to love our neighbors as ourselves.  
But we make far too many distinctions,  
treating one person with more dignity and respect than another.  
We gladly welcome those who look and act like us,  
but give a much less enthusiastic welcome to the stranger.  
Forgive us for the moments when our faith has been empty,  
for the times that our works have not matched our words.  
Help us lean ever more towards your goodness  
and help our lives reflect that goodness in concrete ways.** (silence) **Amen.**

**Assurance of Pardon**The Psalmist reminds us:  
Happy are those whose help is in God, whose hope is in the Lord.  
Friends, God has heard our cry and has forgiven us our sins.  
**Alleluia! Amen.**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

**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!**

**Prayers of the People (responsive)**

Let us pray to God saying:  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

Gracious God, we come before your word this day  
and are reminded of the strong commands of the author of James.  
We are humbled to be reminded that there have been times  
when we’ve given preferential treatment to those for whom it is easier to do so.  
As your people, we have long struggled to give the same love to a stranger  
as to the person who we’ve known for so long.  
Help us, as a congregation, speak and act  
as ones for whom hospitality is the priority.  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

Loving God,  
we give you thanks for the gift of faith  
that is found through Jesus Christ, your son.  
Help us bring that gift to life through our living,  
that we may be missional servants of your Kingdom.  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

Where there are those who are naked, may we clothe them.  
Where there are those without homes, may we house them.  
Where there are those without acceptance, may we welcome them.  
Where there are those without family, may we make them our own.  
In all things, help us to fulfill your commandment to love one another.  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

We pray this day for congregations such as ours  
who are discerning how to be faithful to your calling  
in these tumultuous times.  
We trust that you do not abandon us when the going gets rough.  
Rather, you walk alongside us as a friend  
and hold our hand as a loving parent  
to guide us in the path of faithfulness.  
Thank you, Gracious God, for your steadfast love.  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

Be with those whom we love and those who love them,  
for those who are undergoing health problems…  
for those who are struggling with mental health…  
for those who lack health care…  
for those who have suffered from the plague of gun violence in this country…  
for those who have looked to the Church for comfort and found a closed door…  
for those who live from paycheck to paycheck despite being fully employed.  
Beloved God, **awaken our faith and guide our hearts.**

Hear us, Loving God,  
as we pray the prayer you taught us to pray, saying: **Our Father…**

**Time out for Teaching: Theologies of Prayer**

What happens when we pray?

Why don’t we get what we want – is it because we didn’t have enough faith, or God doesn’t want to answer us or something else?

So what are some basic ideas about prayer?

Ask whatever you want and with enough faith, God will give it to you. Problems with this?

Don’t bother asking because whatever you get is whatever will be anyways. Sort of a fatalistic perspective.

Prayer may seem like we’re trying to change circumstances by asking God to intervene. And we are encouraged to do so by praying, such as using the very bold Lord’s Prayer. To ask for our daily bread, to ask for God’s will to be done, to ask for forgiveness and the ability to forgive. These are huge elements of our faith, and an act of relying fully on God’s help.

But what if prayer is also a way for God to change us? Has this happened to you?

**Prayer for Illumination**

**James 2:1-10, 14-17**

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.

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.

**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: A Man of Distinction**

Jesus is a man of distinction. In Mark’s pair of healing stories, Jesus dips his toe into ministry to the Gentiles. It is a major turning point in the gospel narrative. He already set the stage when in chapter 5 when he cast the Legion of demons out of that poor man in chains in the cemetery, and the healed man, “sound of mind” went away preaching to everyone in the Decapolis about what Jesus did.

And here we are today, 2 chapters later, and Jesus is back in the region. And thanks to that man from the cemetery, the word about Jesus has spread about the region, gone ahead of him, and has caught up with him, so there is nowhere for Jesus to run, nowhere for Jesus to hide. And even the charge he gives the onlookers at the end of our story today - to not say anything to anyone - seems futile now, for they continue to pass on the word, in spite of his instructions not to.

Furthermore, Jesus, the Jewish healer and teacher, seems more like the student in these two stories. Just before these two stories, Jesus has just beaten the Pharisees at a debate over rituals and purity. But now, in Sidon and Tyre, which were Gentile areas, Jesus is a stranger in a strange land, a Jew in a ritually impure city, crossing over new boundaries where Jews don’t belong. Jesus entered a house, trying not to be seen, but he immediately becomes the center of attention, as the woman falls at his feet begging for his help. His answer to the woman is unmistakably rude. He refers to the Gentiles as dogs. To be fair, many rabbis of Jesus’ time called non-Jews “dogs”. It was a derogatory term going back to the Old Testament. But here, he gets a smart response. Remember how Jesus bested the Pharisees in their debates? Now, after Jesus’ dog reference, the woman seems to have bested Him.

What does your faith say about the Jesus of this story? The Teacher appears to have gotten schooled. Jesus was not walking on familiar soil. And, he was talking the talk of a traditional Pharisee. What do you suppose Jesus is up to here? Our faith confesses that Jesus was “fully human, fully divine.” Some have said that maybe his humanity was showing here more than his divinity. That could be. Only it assumes that his humanity and divinity could be so clearly divided in two. But God with us, God in the flesh, Jesus is probably a lot more complex than that. We certainly are.

Some say that Jesus, in his perfection, knew exactly what he was doing. For example, he was floating an idea out to the woman, not necessarily as a roadblock to her supplication, but as a test for her faith, or to give her a chance to use her faith. Whether you perceive the test as cruel or unfair, this Gentile woman steps up to the plate and demonstrates her faith, with her willingness to give Jesus a spirited argument. Jesus sees and hears her persistence in her turnabout response: “Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from the children’s table.” She has won the argument, and it looks as though Jesus has been changed by seeing things her way, for when he arrives in the next town, Jesus doesn’t even hesitate to lay his Jewish hands upon that Gentile man. Before, Jesus healed that woman’s daughter from a distance, now Jesus has broken through new boundaries of ministry by placing his hands on a Gentile man.

Jesus moves through boundaries in this pair of healing stories, is willing to listen to and speak to a woman, and seems to have loosened up in his view of others who didn’t have the privilege of being called God’s children. Are you surprised at Jesus in these stories? Here is what they tell me: Jesus welcomes our persistence, will even our arguements with Him. And Jesus has a mission to everyone, no matter our color, language, our gender, our health condition, our social class, and perhaps we can say a little word of thanks for this woman.

If we embrace these images of Jesus today, perhaps it opens our minds and hearts to knowing we too are allowed to be as persistent as that woman. It just goes to show we will never be punished for asking God for what we need, even if God adds some challenges to our plates. God always wants us to talk to Him about anything and everything. The more we talk to God about anything and everything, the more we exercise our faith and grow closer to God’s heart.

And what if we also embraced the image of Jesus, whenever the world comes falling at our feet in need? Will we bring our traditions to bear? Can we also like Jesus, be flexible with our ideas? Can we be good listeners, engaged others in honest dialogue about what we believe, and maybe willing to be changed when the Holy Spirit shows herself?

Jesus is truly a man of distinction. When we remember he truly had these conversations with people, we are invited to be a part of the story, and we are involved in those same conversations we see in Scripture. Thank God that we have him to listen to us and show us how to live. Amen.

**Announcements:**

**Next Sunday is Fellowship Dinner!** It would be the perfect time to invite a friend to church. Don’t forget to bring a dish to share. We’re having a Fall cookout for dinner this month, so be sure to bring something that goes well with hamburgers and hot dogs!

***“Honey Do” -*** *After Fellowship Dinner,* please stay after and help us put away the round tables and organize the room for the upcoming Rummage Sale. Many hands make light work. The Presbyterian Women thank you in advance.