

Home Service for 7/12/20

Welcome and Announcements

Although we cannot meet together in the church building we can share worship together in our individual homes. We will continue to work to stay connected and be there for each other during the difficult time. We are going through something never experience before. I hope this will help you worship God today with those who are in your home. Add hymns if possible, too.

Gathering Prayer:

Lord, nourish the soil of our lives with goodness, courage, hope and love that we may grow in your word and in your way. AMEN.

Ask the Sower to cast you onto good, fertile soil, that you may bear the fruit of faith and love.

Opening Prayer:

God of old stories and new beginnings, open our lives today to the new that you long to accomplish in our lives. As you called Abraham and Sarah to walk faithfully with you, speak our names today, call us to higher purposes, fill us with your Spirit that we may worthily praise you and magnify your holy name. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Seed-scattering God, we come to you this day with so many things on our hearts and minds. Some of the events this week have been very positive and have caused us to celebrate; but we are constantly besieged by worries, doubts and fears. These negative things crowd out your word and we become like the useless soil, unable to receive and grow. Slow us down. Continue to pour your love on us because we really hunger and thirst for it. Forgive us when we allow all the negativity to drown out your word. Scatter again the seeds of peace, love, hope and joy that we may be better disciples for you in this world which is in so much pain. AMEN.

Words of Assurance

Here's the Good News! God is never going to stop showering us with God's love.....all the time, everywhere.....always for us. Hallelujah!

Read Psalm 119:105-112

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. ¹⁰⁶ I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws. ¹⁰⁷ I have suffered much; preserve my life, LORD, according to your word. ¹⁰⁸ Accept, LORD, the willing praise of my mouth and teach me your laws. ¹⁰⁹ Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law. ¹¹⁰ The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. ¹¹¹ Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. ¹¹² My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end. ^[a]

Prayers of the People:

We bow before you, O God, in awe of your creation. Its vastness staggers our imagination. Its beauty kindles our excitement. Its mystery defies our understanding. As Jesus spoke to the crowds in Galilee in parables, sometimes you speak to us in parables. Your words are loud and powerful, but their meaning is not always clear.

Yet we sense the heartbeat behind your handiwork. In Jesus you have revealed your face, and we are delighted by what we see. We see power restrained by goodness. We see nature guided by humanity. We see purpose directed by love. We thank you, O Great Communicator, for the revelation of yourself in Jesus. At first we thank you for lowering yourself to our level. But as we look more closely at Jesus, we see that, instead, you raised us up to your level.

We grow uncomfortable in your company. Our humanity drags us down again to the level from which we ascended. Unlike Paul, we break under the weight of today's problems. We are constantly on the lookout for the quick fix. When our neighbor speaks to us harshly, we answer in kind without pausing to ask why. When given a chance to close a quick sale on dubious terms, we promise to be more ethical next time. When some foreign people opt for a system different from our own, we are quicker to denounce their choice than we are to study their history. For this rush to judgment, we ask your forgiveness, O God. We pray for the rebirth of patience, that we might think beyond our present circumstances. Give us the grace to weigh our actions in light of their consequences on people yet unborn and on people in other lands. Let us hope for a world that we cannot yet see a world in

which we are as quick to bestow freedom as we are to claim it—and grant us the courage to labor for the world of our hope.

When we think of the degree to which our hope exceeds our grasp, we also remember the multitudes who cling to hope because hope is all that remains. We pray, O God, that you will move us to act in their behalf, that both we and they might obtain the liberty of the children of God. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day, our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Genesis 25:19-34

This is the account of the family line of Abraham's son Isaac.

Abraham became the father of Isaac,²⁰ and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean from Paddan Aram^[a] and sister of Laban the Aramean.

²¹ Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was childless. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. ²² The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

²³ The LORD said to her,

"Two nations are in your womb,
and two peoples from within you will be separated;
one people will be stronger than the other,
and the older will serve the younger."

²⁴ When the time came for her to give birth, there were twin boys in her womb. ²⁵ The first to come out was red, and his whole body was like a hairy garment; so they named him Esau.^[b] ²⁶ After this, his brother came out, with his hand grasping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.^[c] Isaac was sixty years old when Rebekah gave birth to them.

²⁷ The boys grew up, and Esau became a skillful hunter, a man of the open country, while Jacob was content to stay at home among the tents. ²⁸ Isaac, who had a taste for wild game, loved Esau, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹ Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. ³⁰ He said to Jacob, “Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!” (That is why he was also called Edom.^[d])

³¹ Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

³² “Look, I am about to die,” Esau said. “What good is the birthright to me?”

³³ But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

³⁴ Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

Read the Epistle Lesson: Romans 8:1-11

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you^[a] free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh,^[b] God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering.^[c] And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life^[d] because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of^[e] his Spirit who lives in you.

Read the Gospel Lesson: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: “A farmer went

out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear.”

¹⁸ “Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: ¹⁹ When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path. ²⁰ The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, they quickly fall away. ²² The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful. ²³ But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.”

Message

This morning’s Gospel is the familiar Parable of the Sower. Jesus loved to teach by using parables. Although Jesus didn’t always explain the parable and most certainly He didn’t explain them to everyone who heard them, this one we have His explanation He provided to His disciples.

So Jesus was teaching from the boat and ends with “Let anyone with ears listen!” Then Jesus leaves the people and goes on with the disciples and this part is skipped in our lesson, but the disciples ask Jesus why he teaches in parables and he says that the people are not ready to hear what he has to say. But then he says to the disciples that they are ready so he continues:

He explains that the seeds in the parable are God’s words. The “seed” of God’s word needs receptive soil if it is to take root. God sows his seed on everyone, regardless of their “soil” or soil condition. Much of God’s grace goes wasted because it is either ejected or deflected. God’s word will accomplish its purpose, regardless of who or how many reject it.

The Word of God is something powerful to behold. Jesus says He sows the seeds in our hearts because He loves us. It is through His word this day and each day we hear or read that word that He opens the keys to the kingdom of heaven. He sows the word so that we might know the love that the Father has for each of us. He sows that He might claim each of us for eternal life.

In this sense this is a parable of hope, of grace and of mercy. It is a parable about the love of God through Jesus to all people everywhere. He sows, to everyone. The purpose of Jesus telling this parable was to challenge people to change, to open up to God's word and let nothing hinder its taking root in their lives. In the context of what was happening in the ministry of Jesus and, later, in the ministry of his disciples, the parable and its explanation also served to explain why everyone did not accept the tremendous offer of Jesus for salvation both here and now and in and for eternity. It became a parable of encouragement; a truth disciples could remember when they seemed to fail in converting others to Christ. The parable explained, by pointing out that people were as different as soils and not all were receptive to the "seed" of personal growth and eternal life. Jesus' parables have relevance for everyone in the world, for everyone is called. They have relevance for church members, for those who have accepted the call. Finally, they have relevance for individuals who make up the church. So, the types of soil not only describe people, but the types of soil within each person. The self is really multiple. There is a part of us that is closed to God's word, closed to growth, closed to life itself. It is hard and virtually impenetrable, even to ourselves. It is the encrustation of sin, if not actual sin, at least inherited sin. There is also a part of each of us that is shallow, superficial. We all too easily resolve to change, to pray more, to be more this or that, and just as often fail. The word of God delights us for a brief moment and then we revert to former form. And who among us is free from entanglements with the world? Anxieties? The lure of riches? We all have these three types of "soil" or aspects of our personality that mitigate against full acceptance of God's word into the realm of our lives. Yet, we also have that "good soil" that is open to God's seed, God's word. It has taken root in us, if only a small patch of us. Yet, that's all God needs to overtake the weeds, the thorns, the rocky ground that makes up the rest of our soil. Instead of our becoming discouraged, as the early disciples were at the lack of total response to their preaching, Jesus wants us to concentrate on the good soil, to let God's word continue to water it and give it his light and nutrients. He promises that slowly but surely he will overtake the rest of our soil and one day become 100%. Rather than becoming discouraged by looking at the parts of ourselves that are like bad soil, Jesus teaches that we need to accentuate the positive and productive aspects of our persons in order to one day

conquer the rest of ourselves by the very grace of God who has taken root within us, thanks to the divine sower.

Some people have a shut mind all the time Jesus describes this situation as rocky ground. All people have a shut mind sometimes. Some people have a shallow mind all the time, Jesus describes this situation as ground without roots. All people have a shallow mind sometimes. Some people have a cluttered mind all the time. Jesus describes this situation as a field of bramble bushes. All people have cluttered minds sometimes. But who has an open mind, described by Jesus as rich soil, all the time? Or even some of the time? True, there are some people whose minds are so open they are open at both ends and they have no bottom, no base set of values, no anchors. But, an open mind? A person always open to the truth wherever it might be revealed is a truly rare and rich person. Yet, that is what we are offered in accepting Jesus and his vision and version of truth.

Jesus sows, to everyone. Grace, Gospel, Salvation is brought to everyone through the word that is sown. But then there is a part of this parable that strikes us in the heart as we realize that we are the soil. How do we receive the word that is sown? Are we like the path, or the shallow ground, or are we filled with thorns, or are we the fertile soil in which the Word that is sown is allowed to grow? And if we are the fertile ground, will the Word grow, 100 fold, 60 fold, 50 fold, 10 fold? Only God knows the answer to that question. How do you and I receive the Word of God in our hearts? That is the question we have to answer. There is a sense in this parable that Jesus is asking each of us to look inside and see how we receive His word. So take the time to look into your own heart to see, today. Amen.

Benediction:

Today, O God, we have turned to you in search of direction for our lives, and you did not turn us away. You have opened our ears to your word, our eyes to your purpose, and our hearts to your presence. Now send us forth as people who hear with their ears, see with their eyes, and understand with their hearts, that your word might bear fruit within us and through us. Amen.