

Home Service for July 12, 2026

Welcome and Announcements

You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

May Christ who dwells in you continue to do good work in you, blessing you with grace and perseverance to continue on in the journey of faith as you grow into the image of Christ more and more every day. Amen.

Call to Worship:

Come, whether weary or rejoicing.

Come, whether at peace or in the midst of a struggle.

Come, whether growing or wilting.

For all are welcome here in God's presence.

Opening Prayer:

Loving God, you created life in us and all around us. Open us to receive your gifts of your world and your word that we may be not just hearers of the word, but doers also. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

Holy God, we want to be your perfect children. But like Jacob and Esau before us, we are far from perfect. In our yearning, we're as likely to settle for second best or to reach for things that seem so right but ultimately draw us further away from you. Help us choose the better portion. Give us the courage to grow as disciples in your word, even when it seems hard. And when the thorns and weeds begin choking us, resuscitate us with your grace, revive us with your love, and reclaim us as your children, imperfect though we may be. In grateful hope, we pray. Amen.

Words of Assurance:

The Spirit of Christ is strong enough for even the weariest of spirits. Rest in Christ's Spirit, and you will find comfort. Trust in Christ's Spirit, and growth will begin anew.

Read Psalm 25

In you, LORD my God,

I put my trust.

² I trust in you;

do not let me be put to shame,

nor let my enemies triumph over me.

³ No one who hopes in you

will ever be put to shame,
 but shame will come on those
 who are treacherous without cause.
⁴ Show me your ways, LORD,
 teach me your paths.
⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
 for you are God my Savior,
 and my hope is in you all day long.
⁶ Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love,
 for they are from of old.
⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth
 and my rebellious ways;
 according to your love remember me,
 for you, LORD, are good.
⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
 therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
⁹ He guides the humble in what is right
 and teaches them his way.
¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful
 toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.
¹¹ For the sake of your name, LORD,
 forgive my iniquity, though it is great.
¹² Who, then, are those who fear the LORD?
 He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.^[b]
¹³ They will spend their days in prosperity,
 and their descendants will inherit the land.
¹⁴ The LORD confides in those who fear him;
 he makes his covenant known to them.
¹⁵ My eyes are ever on the LORD,
 for only he will release my feet from the snare.
¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
 for I am lonely and afflicted.
¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart
 and free me from my anguish.
¹⁸ Look on my affliction and my distress
 and take away all my sins.
¹⁹ See how numerous are my enemies
 and how fiercely they hate me!
²⁰ Guard my life and rescue me;
 do not let me be put to shame,

for I take refuge in you.

²¹ May integrity and uprightness protect me,
because my hope, LORD,^[c] is in you.

²² Deliver Israel, O God,
from all their troubles!

Prayers of the People:

God who plants seeds of hope and justice within our lives, we are so grateful for this community of faith and for all, anywhere, who hunger and thirst for your healing, reconciling word. You know all the things that are on our hearts today and you bring us together in love and support. We ask your healing mercies with those who struggle with illness of every kind, with feeling lost and marginalized; for those who mourn and for whom the darkness of sorrow enshrouds them. We ask your growth-producing love for all those who celebrate and rejoice today. Be with each one of us and all those whom we have named in our hearts before you. Help us to reach out to each other in compassion and support, for we ask these things 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 Old Testament 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^{f[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

Our Gospel for today presents to us one of the well known parables of Jesus that we have come to know as “The Parable of the Sower.” Now in Matthews, “The Parable of the Sower” actually stands as the first parable in a whole series of parables that Jesus used to explain what the kingdom of heaven is like. And because the parable leads off His teaching about the kingdom of heaven this section is important because it provides for us an opportunity for a key to understanding all the parables that Jesus told to His disciples. And so, it is no wonder that this parable is one of the few parables in all the gospels that provides for us an actual explanation of its true meaning.

Jesus was now drawing huge crowds. People from all over came to see the famous rabbi and hear him teach. On this day the crush was so intense that Jesus ended up climbing in a boat and rowing offshore a ways. His boat gently bobbed up and

down across the waves. He looked ashore and saw the crowd gathered along the beach. Why had they all come? Certainly, there were many different reasons. Some were curiosity seekers. They were energized by seeing the unusual and the exotic. And Jesus was definitely the best show around. They were there because they just were not going to miss it!

Some were skeptics. They came to scoff and make fun of the gathering. They were thinking: Who does that guy think he is? And look at all these dumb suckers who are lapping up this performance! Some were seekers for the secret of life. They flitted from one sensation to the next like a honey bee grazing on flowers. They absorbed a little bit of this and a little bit of that. But other people actually came to Jesus with an open heart. They genuinely wanted to hear his message. They recognized the truth of his word.

Jesus could hear all the chatter. He knew about the negative talkers and the thrill seekers. What bearing does it have on him and his mission? How could he continue his purpose through the side dramas and negative energy? This is how: He knew that none of it mattered! What did matter was his mission. Jesus only needed to be faithful to his purpose. And his purpose was to announce that the Kingdom of God had come into their midst.

So, Jesus told this parable to this wide range of people along the shore. He told them about a farmer. It was planting time and he was in his field. He dips into the grain sack and takes out a handful of seed. Then he begins to sow. He releases the seed in a broad arc and watches as it falls to the ground. The seed falls in random spots. Some of it lands on the nearby pathway. Other lands in a rocky patch. Some falls in a weedy area. But other seed finds its destination on the good soil of the field.

That is the thing about planting seeds. The farmer's life involves a tremendous amount of risk. Farmers are at the mercy of so many unknowns. Crops can fail for any number of reasons: Frost, flooding, hail, and drought. Swarms of locusts, cattle getting loose, bug infestations. Nothing is certain until the harvest is in the barn. From the first planting to the actual harvest, a farmer's existence is hemmed in by risk. But none of that deters the farmer. If you are going to be dominated by fear and everything that could possibly go wrong, then farming is definitely not the profession for you!

The good news is that fear of disaster is the last thing a farmer is thinking about when he plants his crops. If you have ever planted anything, you know for yourself that is just not so! Planting is all about hope. Even as you put that seed in the soil you can already envision the harvest! In your mind, that harvest is already ready to be gathered! You can see those shiny green peppers as you lay their seeds or plant

the young plants in the soil. You can taste those juicy, homegrown tomatoes, those cucumbers turned into pickles, hear the crisp snap of the green bean even before you cover the seeds in their blanket of dark earth. Planting is future-oriented. It is an act of hope. Even when your yard was nothing but bare soil, you were already imagining that cool carpet of lush, green grass as you broadcast the seed. You turn the sprinklers on and dream about the scent of freshly cut grass. You envision walking barefoot on it.

No, nothing is more optimistic, more full of hope, than planting seeds! Hope: that is what keeps us going as we start planning our gardens even though there is snow still on the ground. As the snow slowly melts, we look forward to the day we can turn over our gardens and finally plant the seeds. Farmers may talk a pessimistic streak, but do not let them fool you. In their heart of hearts, they are totally optimists! Face it they have to be.

As Jesus preaches from the fishing boat, he gazes at the diverse crowd before him. And he definitely had a farmer's heart. He saw the future harvest. In the back of his mind, he remembered the words from the prophet Isaiah:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
So shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;
it shall not return to me empty,
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,
and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Jesus knew there would be a harvest! God's word will not fail in its purpose. His mission would bear fruit in due season.

So, what about us, are not we the present-day disciples of Christ? What does this parable and this situation mean for us? What does it mean for our lives of mission and service in the name of Christ? Let us not forget: the sower does not fret over the seed thrown in unlikely places. He continues on his mission with his trust and belief in the harvest to come.

Friends, as we go about our daily activities, we have opportunity to be sowers of the seed of God's kingdom. In all that we say and in all that we do, we are the bearers of the divine influence in this world. Our words and actions are that seed. And that seed will bear fruit. In who or when we do not know, we just need to believe and trust.

There are times we can look at a situation and we sum it up with despair. We make a decision: it is not beneficial to waste this good grain. Better to hold off and use those seeds where a favorable outcome is more likely. But here is the question we must answer: Are we called to sow the Kingdom Seeds in despair? Or do we sow them in hope?

Jesus sowed his words and actions in the fervent belief of his harvest. His final days on this earth seemed to appear that he had dumped his entire bag of grain directly onto the pathway. The angry birds of his hostile enemies swooped in and consumed him. His whole ministry was laid bare on the cross. His life gobbled up by death. But we must remember that the seed cannot grow unless it dies. Until the seed is buried, it cannot be born again. Jesus could not germinate the new Kingdom Life until he had been buried in the grave. On the cross, it looked like he had just wasted his entire ministry. He had cast all his seeds to the wind.

But that Word-of-God-made-flesh was going to accomplish that which it purposed! Instead of death, the tree of new life was going to arise! In the place of sin, up sprang grace! No, Jesus' words were not sown in vain. They were not sown in despair. They were sown in hope, the hope and knowledge that God's good grace has come to redeem the world unto God's self.

That is the power of God's love. That love is the seed Christ came to sow. May that seed be planted in our hearts. May it sprout and take root within us. And may our lives bear the fruits of divine love: thirty-fold, sixty-fold, one hundred-fold! Know that God is a generous seed sower. It is my prayer that we may be as generous as well.

Let us pray: Almighty God, you call your church to witness that in Christ we are reconciled to you. Help us to proclaim the "Good News" of your love, that all who hear it may turn to you and further spread the seed of your Word. We pray this in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Benediction:

May the Spirit who dwells in you bless you with open minds to receive God's wisdom, open hearts to follow God's guidance, and open doors that we may together build God's kingdom of life and peace on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.