

Time after Pentecost July 12 2020 Worship at Home Lect A

Good morning – welcome to worship

I hope you are able to gather everyone in your household together this morning. If you are not alone - assign parts of this beforehand. If you don't have a Bible you can google the scripture readings and print them out too. Perhaps print out copies of this for everyone present. This Liturgy is from the ELW book. Prayers are from Sundays & Seasons.

Shut off all the distractions in your home. Sit in the quiet for a bit – take some deep breaths. Light your candle.

The Gathering

Call to Worship

Call to the Lord, who hears our prayers.
Wait for the Lord, the source of our hope.
Sing to the Lord, who delights in our songs.
Let us worship.

Greeting: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Hymn LBW 241 ELW 870 We Praise You, O God

Prayer of the Day

God of new life, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit, help us to receive it with joy, and live according to it. Help us to grow in faith, and hope, and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

The WORD

Isaiah 55:10-13 Psalm 65:9-13 Romans 8:1-11 Matthew 13:1-9,18-23

Sermon by Deacon Michelle Collins, Assistant to the Bishop of the Manitoba, North Western Ontario Synod.

There's a difference between building something by following the directions correctly, and discovering something in the process of creating. Some things need a full and complete set of instructions—assembling a bicycle or fixing a machine. But other things are best created when the directions are set aside and the heart and imagination of the one creating can be let loose. When it comes to understanding what Jesus refers to as the Kingdom of heaven, or the kingdom of God, many people try to approach it like following a set of instructions. What do I need to do first? Do I need a wrench or a hammer? How will I know if I've built it correctly? We seek to construct the correct way of understanding and articulating how it is that God shows up in the world, what God is up to, and who God's work benefits.

But Jesus makes it clear that understanding the kingdom of heaven is not like following assembly instructions. It's more like listening to a story over and over again, each time hearing something different. It's more like the process of planting, where you watch the beauty of creation happen in ways that are largely beyond your understanding. It's more like being in a relationship with someone who becomes more complex and multi-dimensional the deeper the relationship goes. It's more like sitting on a hillside listening to a story and realizing that the story is not really about seeds and soil, but about the abundant potential of life and creation.

In the gospel reading today, we read the first of several stories that Jesus tells to try to describe or explain the kingdom. In Matthew, these parables are all in one chapter, while in other gospels, these parables are interspersed with other events and activities. But Matthew presents these stories all together, so while we will

pick up one of them to look at it a little bit more closely, it's important for us to wonder what we may discover when we look at them together.

LISTEN, Jesus says to the crowds, as he begins this parable. In other places he dives right into the with a phrase like "the kingdom of heaven is like..." But this story he begins with an invitation to listen. Hmm... Already, that is an invitation to imagination. There will be time for questions and analysis later...start by listening. And he tells them a parable...which was a teaching technique they were familiar with, where a teacher tells a story that means something other than what the story was about. So, while he tells the story of a farmer scattering seeds, the disciples at least realized that he was really talking about something else. It's so easy to get caught up in trying to draw clear and concise conclusions about what each part of a parable represents. But parables were not meant to be clear and concise. They were purposely intended to invite the audience into deeper listening and wondering.

In Jesus' story about the farmer, the seeds don't get much say in where they land. The image of the sower is one who generously scatters seed in all directions. It doesn't even look like the sower takes much time to evaluate the likelihood that the seeds being sown will grow. He goes ahead and throws the seeds broadly and generously. He must know that seeds don't grow on rocky path. He must know that seeds don't grow well in the midst of weeds. But that doesn't stop the farmer from scattering the seed anyway.

I can almost hear all the expert farmers in the crowd shooting their hands up and challenging Jesus' story. They would immediately see that the sower should have known better than to scatter the seeds in places he knew wouldn't produce life.

But I can just as clearly see Jesus saying, “listen...what else might be going on in this story?”

Throughout the gospel accounts, we read a variety of ways that people respond to Jesus’ message about the kingdom of Heaven. Some rejected the message outright. Some listen for a bit, but when the teaching got challenging or they didn’t get what they wanted when they wanted it, they left. Even the disciples were not always particularly receptive to what Jesus was saying, and many of them ran away when being associated with him became risky to them. In fact, many of the disciples had multiple responses to what Jesus was saying, depending on the day and the situation. But Jesus kept teaching them, kept loving them, kept inviting them into a deeper listening. He kept scattering the seed of life, healing, restoration, hoping that those who heard it would be ready for it to take root and grow in them.

And Jesus does the same thing for us. Sometimes we are the rocky path, sometimes the weeds, every now and then we’re the good soil. Sometimes we’re receptive to the word of the kingdom and it takes root in our souls, but then gets choked out by the worries of the world. Sometimes due to pain, tragedy or trauma the word of life and hope just can’t even find its way in, and gets snatched up as soon as it lands. But every now and then, the seed takes root. We hear the words of life and forgiveness declared to us and we respond through faith with love for God and neighbor. But even though we are not always the good soil, Jesus the Word doesn’t give up on us. God the Sower keeps scattering seeds, and extending invitations to us to listen, to discover the kingdom that God is bringing

about, and to be open to the creative mystery of life and love that has been planted in us.

Listen, Jesus said. Don't get caught up in judging yourself or others for the condition of the heart. That's not what it's about. Receive the gift of life. Participate in the mystery of creation. Tend to the environment so that life has the best chance possible to thrive. And keep listening so that when the word of God sneaks up on you, you detect it. Keep listening so that when the word of God happens to you, you receive it. Rest from the impulse to control and construct the perfect response. You won't always get it right, and a lot of times you won't even really understand what God is doing in your life. But listen...open yourself up to the possibility that there's something deeper, more profound going on within and around you, and let the seed of God's Word take root in your life.

In the Lord's prayer there is this phrase that is easy to rush past: "thy kingdom come." In his explanation of this petition, Martin Luther said that "the kingdom will come whether or not we pray for it to. But in this, we pray that it comes to us."

The kingdom will come whether or not we pray for it to. But in this, we pray that it comes to us. The sower will scatter seeds because that's what the sower does. In this, we pray that the seeds that land in the soil of our lives and our communities will take root, will grow and will produce rich fruit as an abundant blessing to all.

When Jesus talks about the kingdom, he makes it clear that the kingdom is not something we find through our own efforts. We don't work our way into it. We

don't pay for it or earn it. The kingdom is a gift, a seed that is planted, a treasure that is discovered. And the gift of the kingdom is for all—those who get it and those who don't. Let anyone with ears, listen, Jesus says. Discipleship is the journey of being shaped and transformed by the seed of faith that is planted in us through the grace of God. Growing as a disciple happens as we pray that the kingdom comes to us. The seed takes root and grows in us and through us for the sake of the world.

If you find yourself trying to follow the instructions correctly in an effort to construct the most accurate understanding of what God is up to, these parables from Jesus invite you to be released from that pressure. Understanding God's kingdom is less like following a manual of instructions, and more like listening to stories or looking through a kaleidoscope. Each time you listen, you hear something new. Each time you turn the kaleidoscope, you see something different. So, this week, pick up this story of the sower who generously scatters seed without being preoccupied with the result, and look at it again. Turn it to the left and to the right to rearrange the pieces a bit, and see what new thing emerges. Shake it up a bit and look again. That's where growth and life happens. The sower will keep sowing seeds. The kingdom will come, whether or not we pray for it to. In this, we pray that it takes root and grows in us. Amen.

HYMN LBW 234 or ELW 516 Almighty God, Your Word is Cast

Prayers of the people prayed by Cathy Zimmerling

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for missionaries and newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding God, care for all who are in need *especially those we name now*
For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might grow as disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries and deepen relationships with the wider community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

The 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.

HYMN ELW 550 or LBW 261 On What has now been sown

Benediction

The Lord bless you and keep you,
The Lord's face shine upon you and be gracious unto you,
The Lord look upon you with favour and give you (+) peace. Amen.

Dismissal Go in peace. Christ is with you. **Thanks be to God.**