

TCC Takeout

An Order of Service for Worship at Home

God's Extravagant Welcome:

“No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, YOU are welcome here!”

July 12, 2020

Sixth Sunday of Pentecost



CALL TO WORSHIP

Life-Giving God, you have called us to the fountain of new life, new vision, new hope, new fellowship with you and with one another.

We come rejoicing! You kept your promise.

Faithful God, you promised never to leave or forsake us.

We come in victory! You kept your promise.

All-Powerful, Sustaining God, you promised to set us free from the law of sin and death.

We come with hearts of thanksgiving and our minds are stayed on you because you kept your promise. Hallelujah!

OPENING HYMN [God Whose Love is Reigning O'er Us](#)

God, whose love is reigning o'er us,

source of all, the ending true;
Hear the universal chorus
raised in joyful praise to you:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
worship ancient, worship new.

Word of God from nature bringing
springtime green and autumn gold;
Mountain streams like children singing,
ocean waves thunder bold:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
as creation's tale is told.

Holy God of ancient glory,
choosing man and woman too;
Abram's faith and Sarah's story
formed a people bound to you.
Alleluia, Alleluia,
to your covenant keep us true.

Covenant, new again in Jesus,
starchild born to set us free;
Sent to heal us, sent to teach us
how love's children we might be.
Alleluia, Alleluia,
risen Christ, our Savior he!

Lift we then our human voices
in the songs that faith would bring;
Live we then in human choices
lives that, like our music sing:
Alleluia, Alleluia,
joined in love our praises ring!

GATHERING 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.**

GLORIA PATRI ([Audio Version](#))

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost
As it was in the beginning,
Is now and ever shall be,
World without end,
Amen, Amen.

READINGS FROM SCRIPTURE

Romans 8:1-11 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Matthew 13:1-23 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!" ¹⁰Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" ¹¹He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. ¹²For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. ¹³The reason I speak to them in parables is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' ¹⁴With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: 'You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. ¹⁵For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn— and I would heal them.' ¹⁶But blessed are your

eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. ¹⁷Truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, but did not see it, and to hear what you hear, but did not hear it. ¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

REFLECTION

Today's passage from Matthew chapter 13 is in 3 sections; the telling of the parable of the sower, Jesus' reason for speaking in parables, and Jesus' explanation of this parable. In the first section, the seed that lands on good soil brings forth a great harvest, while the other seeds die quickly. The second section underscores the importance of storytelling as Jesus clearly tells the disciples that parable stories contain powerful truths that can enlighten and transform people in ways that plain speech cannot. Finally, in the third section, Jesus indulges the disciples by explaining the parable, after all. Jesus connects the different types of ground on which seeds have been sown to different types of people. To these three sections, I would like to add a fourth section, a sequel; the care of the different types of ground.

But first let's look a bit more closely at the parable. A sower scatters seeds, which, Jesus says, is God's word that lands in various places. The seed that falls on the path, Jesus says, is like the person who does not have the chance to understand and grow in God's word because of the interference of the evil one. The seed that falls on rocky ground is like the person for whom God's word does not take root. The seed that lands among thorns is like the person who gets overwhelmed and choked by worldly concerns. Yet, the seed that falls on good soil is like the person who is able to accept, nourish, and grow God's word to eventually produce much fruit.

Often this parable is told and heard in a prescriptive way; 'you *should* be like the good soil that allows God's word to grow in you, and you *shouldn't* be like the path, or rocky or thorny ground where God's word doesn't take root.' There is implicit judgement in this way of interpreting the parable. Of course, Jesus desires for us to grow in God's word, but I'm not sure that Jesus is condemning the types of ground -- the types of people --

where the seed does not grow so well, especially if people have little choice in the type of ground that happens to be their life. Instead of telling this parable in a prescriptive way, might Jesus be describing, and lifting up to our attention, the various inequitable grounds that people are given to stand on in this life?

I think so. And this is why I would like to add a fourth section to this passage in Matthew. I would like to add a section about how those who, for whatever reasons and circumstances in life, are like the 'good soil' might learn about the realities of life on other types of ground. I would like this section to include a message to those people who see themselves as the 'good soil' that they might learn the longing of 'the path' for seed to live, and the resilience of the 'rocky' and 'thorny' ground that tries again and again to nourish the seed despite treacherous obstacles. I would like this section to say more about the importance of describing the realities of all people's lives so that those for whom the soil is rich and pliable can learn empathy and compassion for those whose lives did not land them in such privileged places as the 'good soil.' I would like this section to say more about verse 12: "For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away." I would like to highlight this passage as describing the unfortunate unequal reality of human society and not as prescribing justification for perpetuating unjust systems.

Jesus taught in parables because parables have the strength to hold the heavy truths of our lives. And Jesus challenged his listeners to really see and hear, to really find and plumb the depths of meaning in his teachings. And so it is that Jesus is challenging us, too, to really know the world in which we live, the world beyond our comfortable home and neighborhood, that we might also know how to respond to what we see. Not everyone stands on equal ground; some are on much higher, coveted ground than others will ever get to. Standing on this high ground might be the result of race, gender, age, ability. In any case, it does not seem open to all, though we wish it would be. Jesus says, '[let] anyone with ears listen!'

If the parable of the sower can be understood descriptively rather than as judgement, then how are we to take care of different types of ground, different types of lived realities?

Firstly, there is the path. These are folks that so many others seem to walk all over. They are paid little attention by anyone. They begin to believe that they are worth nothing and certainly not worthy to care for anything of substance. Do you know, or have you read of any such persons? How do we help share the Good News that

everyone is of infinite worth in God's eyes? How do we care for 'the path' so that it can breathe and see the sunlight just like the good soil? Usually actions speak louder than words.

Secondly, there is the rocky ground. These are the folks who try hard to settle into a job, or relationship or community, but large boulders and many small stones seem to block their ability to put down roots and develop their potential. This sounds strangely similar to the single mom who is trying hard to get her kids fed and to school, but is faced with a demanding employer and an abusive ex-husband and then receives an eviction notice. How do we help? How do we remove the heavy rocks for these neighbors? Is there a letter to write to our state representative or a phone call to make? How do we make the ground easier for folks to thrive? Usually actions speak louder than words.

Thirdly, there is the thorny ground. These folks are those who are trying so hard, but seem to break under the weight of worry or loss of hope. They don't have the physical or emotional resources to cope, and neither do they have a community to uphold them. They are alone. Have you heard of such difficulty? How do we help carry our neighbor's burdens? How do we initiate connection that proves growth is possible despite the thorns? Usually, friends, actions speak louder than words.

While Jesus only talked about these three types of ground in which seed fails to grow well, we know there are many other such grounds that have never been given the chance to yield fruit thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold. Metaphorically speaking, this may be from a lack of water, nutrients, sunshine or frankly a lack of access to seeds! The point we may be hearing Jesus say as he describes the different types of ground is that not everyone is on level standing. And if we believe that in the kingdom of God "[every] valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill ...made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain" then there is much for us to do to help usher in this kingdom here and now. Jesus says, "[let] anyone with ears listen!"

And let us say in response, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." Amen.

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION [Wonderful Words of Life](#)

JOYS AND CONCERNS

As you take this moment to be in prayer, you may refer to the joys and concerns shared through the Trumpet Blast.

God hears all of our prayers, both those we give words to and say aloud, and those that remain silent in our hearts.

Prayer is always available to us.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Creator God and Giver of all good things, we come before you today in prayer. We know your eagerness for us to grow in your word and to know the world around us. Open our eyes that we might see, open our ears that we might hear, open our lips with courage, and open our hearts with compassion that we might heed your calling to love each other and to live as one.

Today we bring before you our prayers of joy and our prayers of sorrow and concern. Merciful God, hear each of our prayers and grant us the assurance that you hold all things, even life and death, in your hands. In you we are never lost. In you we are never alone. In you we are always loved.

Dear Lord, today we pray for those whose names are dear to us, our family and friends, and those who remain strangers to us.

We pray for those who are sick, those who are lonely, and those who have lost all sense of purpose.

And in this uncertain time of pandemic, we pray for medical workers, garbage collectors, those who clean our facilities, and those who go into others' homes to offer care and support. Protect these people who are sacrificing their own safety for the health of others. We pray for a speedy development of a COVID vaccine and we pray for its equal and fair distribution.

We pray for those in leadership positions that they may make wise decisions. We pray for those who are struggling for legal rights and for those who are fighting to change unjust laws. We pray for your presence in these righteous battles.

And we pray for those in need of beauty and kindness. Merciful God, that is all of us. But let us be co-creators with you to bring more beauty, kindness and goodness into this world. We are your children made in your image, so embolden us for this joyful work.

We pray with sincerity and gratitude for today is the day You have made; we will rejoice and be glad in it!

In Christ's name, Amen.

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Let us join together in the prayer our Lord Jesus taught us to say ~

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 sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE ([Audio version](#))

Hear Our Prayer, O God,
Hear our prayer, O God,
Incline Thine ear to us,
And Grant us your peace.

PASTORAL BENEDICTION

Go out in joy and be led back in peace.
The mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.
Go from here in the joy of God,
secure in God's presence around you and within you.
Amen.

Go in peace to serve God and your neighbor in love.

[Resources]

*Call to Worship from

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning/nothing-shall-separate-us/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-lecti-onary-planning-notes/sixth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-a-liturgical-resources>

*ucc.org Worship Ways.