

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 26, 2020

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, people of God, to give thanks and sing!
All: **We come in remembrance of all that God has done for us.**
One: All around us the world shouts God's praises!
All: **Let us join in the song of thanksgiving to God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "This Is My Father's World" GtG 370

1. **This is my Father's world,
and to my listening ears
all nature sings, and round me rings
the music of the spheres.
This is my Father's world;
I rest me in the thought
of rocks and trees, of skies and seas,
his hand the wonders wrought.**
2. **This is my Father's world.
O, let me ne'er forget
that though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the ruler yet.
This is my Father's world.
The battle is not done:
Jesus who died shall be satisfied,
and earth and heaven be one.**

(Public Domain)

***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

We sing your praises, O Lord, for we know of your goodness and your compassion. Look tenderly upon us and be quick to forgive, for we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed. The love you call us to share we have hoarded for ourselves. Our service to you has been weak and half-hearted. Forgive us, gracious God. Restore us by the touch of your love. Renew us by the power of your Spirit. Remake us in the image of your Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON** *(from Psalm 103)*

One: "The Lord is merciful and loving, slow to become angry and full of constant love."

All: "The Lord does not punish us as we deserve or repay us for our sins and wrongs."

One: "As a parent is kind to the children, so the Lord is kind to those who honor the Lord."

All: **So rejoice and be glad! For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven. In Jesus Christ we are given new life. Alleluia! Amen.**

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 13:31-33, 44-50

MATTHEW 13:31-33, 44-50 (New Revised Standard Version)

³¹ He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches."

³³ He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

...
⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶ on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸ when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹ So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰ and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "The Kingdom Is Like..." by Pastor Bill Vincent

He put before them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches." (v.31-32)

The smallest of all seeds. Tiny beginnings.

Maybe so small as to go unnoticed. So small it is dismissed as unimportant. Maybe an idea. Or a person. Or a word. Or a kindness.

Yet from that dismissed, unnoticed beginning, there is growth out of all proportion to its start. The birth, the blooming of astounding potential. Unexpected, unanticipated. We never would have seen it coming. "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46)

So we need not lose heart at its unimportant beginning.

The smallest of all seeds, that grows with branches that spread out and reach out, toward the sun -- or the Son?

And in so doing, a growth that invites, welcomes, and embraces all who come to nest (rest) in its various branches. Birds of a variety of feather from East and West and North and South.

So I dare not break off one of those branches upon which someone else has nested. I dare not prune a branch that the keeper of the kingdom has not.

"The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed..."

He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened." (v.33)

Nowadays, we know the biology and chemistry of yeast:

thousands of living plant-like microorganisms [that,] When activated by warm liquid, and fed by sugar or starch, ...release tiny bubbles of carbon dioxide gas [which] make the dough rise. (Fleischmann's Yeast)

In Jesus' day, they didn't know about microorganisms.

Yeast, or leaven,

was normally added to a batch of bread dough by using an unbaked portion of dough from the previous batch. (Harper's Bible Dictionary)

Then, it was like it had "a life of [its] own." (Harper's)

"**Silent, unrelenting**" in its growth. "**A progressive**" inner working. A "**pervasive**" influence. (Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible)

And the kingdom continues to grow, even when we don't see it. We may see its effects, but it is hidden as it grows, as it continues, as it builds, as it works, God only knows how.

Hmm. Perhaps that's very much to the point: only God knows how.

And, oh, how it grows. In unsuspecting places. In unassuming people. In unseen ways. With "unrelenting growth." With undeniable persistence. So there is hope, there is always hope.

We may not know how, but there is hope. For the kingdom is growing, whether we see it or not. Affecting here, influencing there. Working in you, in me, in us, in the world.

Often we don't see it. But if we look -- and if we are patient -- we will see its effects.

For *"The kingdom of heaven is like yeast...."*

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it."

(v.44-46)

A poor businessman is this merchant, ignoring the studied advice of his day to diversify. Foolishly putting all his eggs into one basket.

But of course, we're not talking economics here. We're talking ... joy.

And, oh, what joy!

To discover, to stumble upon something that is so marvelous that we are willing to give up all else in order to have it, willing to commit all that we have and all that we are to this one item.

Oh, what joy!

To perceive the absolute preciousness of God's reign, God's presence in our lives; of following God and God's way. To discern the supreme value of this kingdom: this kingdom that, like a mustard seed, blossoms in ways out of all proportion to its beginning; this kingdom that, like yeast, affects and influences in ways hidden and unknown. And, knowing the infinite value of this kingdom, to be willing -- indeed, eager! -- to let go all else in order to be a part of it, to give up our claim over everything else in order to embrace and claim this, even as it lays claim to us.

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden ... like a merchant in search of fine pearls...."

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age.

The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

(v.47-50)

Now, I must confess, I'm not all together comfortable with this parable, especially all that talk about separating the evil from the righteous, separating some as good, others as bad.

I'm not comfortable with it because of how that can be used to claim, "I am obviously one of the good ones and you are not." Not comfortable because of the way it can be abused to thrash those with whom I disagree and to legitimize my perception of what is right and wrong

and *who* is right and wrong. Not comfortable with how that can be used -- and has been used, and is being used -- to separate "them" from "us," to pick and choose who's in and who's out.

Yet maybe the parable itself resists such an understanding. For note in the interpretation provided it is the *angels* who "*separate the evil from the righteous,*" not we ourselves. And I know I'm no angel, and -- sorry -- neither are you. So maybe that's not our place.

Still, in spite of all my discomfort, it is unmistakable and undeniable that there is good and evil in the world, and even good and evil within me.

So maybe the parable suggests that there are consequences in our lives: consequences to what we do and don't do, to what we say and don't say, to how we live and don't live.

Some consequences feed the evil.

Some consequences nurture the good.

However the case may be, there *are* consequences to our actions, to our choices, to our decisions.

Not to cast a pall of dread over our heads. "Oh, no! I'm doomed!" No.

For there is also grace. The parables, the ministry, the person of Jesus exude grace.

But grace does not exclude consequences; nor does grace necessarily erase consequences. And we are confronted with the seriousness of the choices we make, the actions we take.

Are we nurturing goodness, or are we contributing to badness? Do the words that flow from our lips reek like a rotten fish? Or do they lend flavor to life like a good fish?

Do our actions and deeds give rise to love, or hatred? How is it with our yeastiness?

Do we welcome and embrace all on the many branches of life, or do we turn some away? How is it with our mustard seed-ness?

What are we willing to give -- and give up -- in order to embrace -- fully, totally -- God's way, God's will, God's kingdom? A kingdom that...

"is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind...."

And Jesus said, *"The kingdom of heaven is like..."*

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

We trust in Jesus Christ,

fully human, fully God.

Jesus proclaimed the reign of God:

preaching good news to the poor

and release to the captives,

teaching by word and deed

and blessing the children,

healing the sick

and binding up the brokenhearted,

eating with outcasts,

forgiving sinners,

and calling all to repent and believe the gospel.

**Unjustly condemned for blasphemy and sedition,
Jesus was crucified,
suffering the depths of human pain
and giving his life for the sins of the world.
God raised this Jesus from the dead,
vindicating his sinless life,
breaking the power of sin and evil,
delivering us from death to life eternal.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Merciful God...

People: ...give us wisdom and courage beyond our imagining.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Contemporary)*

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.**

Give us today our daily bread.

**Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.**

**Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.**

**For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

For your grace and embrace, we give you thanks, O God. For your Spirit at work in our midst, we give you thanks. As we have been blessed by you, so may we be a blessing to others, through the offering of these gifts and the offering of our lives. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “As Trees from Tiny Seeds Can Grow” *[Tune: GtG 202]*

**1. As trees from tiny seeds can grow,
As yeast expands the lifeless dough,
As light, unhampered, shines around,
So does God’s gracious love abound.**

**2. As hidden treasure is reclaimed,
We, God’s new people, are renamed.
For us the pearl, long sought, is found.
Christ is our treasure sure and sound.**

**4. As coins, once lost, are found with joy,
As Jesus loves each girl and boy,
So we, now found by God, rejoice,
Lifting in praise one heart and voice.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE