

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, JULY 7, 2024

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

**FOURTEENTH SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME**

**GATHERING**

**PRELUDE**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

One: It is good to give thanks to God!  
All: **Come to make music to our Lord and Maker.**  
One: Declare God's steadfast love and faithfulness.  
All: **Seek God's help in the sanctuary.**  
One: Listen for the voice of God, speaking to us again.  
All: **How great is our God, Mother and Father of us all!**

**\*OPENING HYMN** "Mothering God, You Gave Me Birth" StF 2050 [tune #738]

**1. Mothering God, you gave me birth  
in the bright morning of this world.  
Creator, source of every breath,  
you are my rain, my wind, my sun.**

**2. Mothering Christ, you took my form,  
offering me your food of light,  
grain of life, and grape of love,  
your very body for my peace.**

**3. Mothering Spirit, nurt'ring one,  
in arms of patience hold me close,  
so that in faith I root and grow  
until I flow'r, until I know.**

Words: Jean Janzen (based on the writings of Juliana of Norwich, 15<sup>th</sup> cent.), © 1991 Abingdon Press (Music Services, Inc.) *Used by permission through CCLI License #11178434. / #2457662.*  
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## UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Gracious God,  
we so often miss your kingdom at work among us.  
Captivated by power and prestige,  
we overlook the seeds you have planted all around.  
Forgive us for failing to notice  
where and how you are at work.  
Forgive us when we work against your plans and purposes.  
Forgive us, we pray, and gently guide us back to your way.  
Help us to grow in faithfulness,  
Renew us with the love of Christ  
so that we live no longer for ourselves,  
but for Christ who became the seed of your  
righteousness in us. Amen.

## SILENT CONFESSION

### ASSURANCE OF PARDON

One: Hear the good news! There is now no condemnation for those who are  
in Christ Jesus!  
**All: Christ has set us free!**  
One: Know you are forgiven. Rejoice in God's grace. Respond with love.  
And be at peace.  
**All: Thanks be to God!**

### 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 Mark 4:1-34

MARK 4:1-34 (New Revised Standard Version, updated edition+)

<sup>1</sup> Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. <sup>2</sup> He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: <sup>3</sup> "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup> And as he sowed, some seed fell on a path, and the birds came and ate it up. <sup>5</sup> Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup> And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away.

<sup>7</sup> Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. <sup>8</sup> Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.” <sup>9</sup> And he said, “Whoever has ears to hear; let them hear.”

<sup>10</sup> When he was alone, those who were around him along with the twelve asked him about the parables. <sup>11</sup> And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything comes in parables, <sup>12</sup> in order that

‘They may look and look,  
yet not see;  
they may listen and listen,  
yet not understand.

otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”

<sup>13</sup> And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? Then how will you understand all the parables? <sup>14</sup> The sower sows the word. <sup>15</sup> These are the ones on the path where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them. <sup>16</sup> And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: when they hear the word, they immediately receive it with joy. <sup>17</sup> But they have no root and endure only for a while; then, when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away. <sup>18</sup> And others are those sown among the thorns: these are the ones who hear the word, <sup>19</sup> but the worries of this life and the seduction of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful. <sup>20</sup> And these are the ones sown on the good soil: they hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirty and sixty and a hundredfold.”

<sup>21</sup> He said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed and not on the lampstand? <sup>22</sup> For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything concealed, except to come out into the open. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear; let them hear.”

<sup>24</sup> And he said to them, “Consider carefully what you hear; with the measure with which you measure, it will be measured to you – and even more. <sup>25</sup> For whoever has, will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

<sup>26</sup> He also said, “The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground <sup>27</sup> and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. <sup>28</sup> All by itself the soil bears fruit, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. <sup>29</sup> But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle because the harvest has come.”

<sup>30</sup> He also said, “With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? <sup>31</sup> It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth, <sup>32</sup> yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”

<sup>33</sup> With many such parables he spoke the word to them as they were able to hear it; <sup>34</sup> he did not speak to them except in parables, but privately to his disciples he explained everything.

## PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON “Sowing – and Receiving – the Seed” by Pastor Bill Vincent

“Are you good soil?”

“Are you rocky soil?”

That may be a tempting way to start as we dive our way into this scene of Jesus teaching by parables.

“Which soil are you?”

But it may not be the best place to start...or the most fruitful.

Actually, there may be a more disturbing (or unsettling) question with which to start:

“Why don’t some people get it?”

This question seems to drive much of the story, as Mark tells it.

In fact, this question may be behind Mark’s telling this story and telling it in just this way. For, more likely than not, this may indeed have been a pressing question for Mark’s audience, as they sought to remember the story of Jesus and his ministry and his impact on them and the rest of the world.

Truth be told, this is still a question for us today.

I mean, we’ve heard the same story and message that many other people have heard. It makes sense to us. It has impacted us – HE has impacted us in our lives.

So why aren’t others on board? How come they don’t see? Why don’t they get it?

Unfortunately, as soon as we ask that question, we may come to find out, we can’t answer it.

Now don’t get me wrong. It’s an important question. And it needs to be acknowledged, and faced up to.

But we just may not be in a position to answer it...beyond what we might glean from our story.

But even what we glean from the passage may be tricky...and unsatisfying.

The “*twelve and those around*” Jesus were confused and had some questions themselves. So they “*asked him about the parables.*”

To which Jesus responds,

“*To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God.*”

Secret? What secret?

“*But for those outside everything comes in parables, in order that*

*They may look and look,*

*yet not see;*

*they may listen and listen,  
yet not understand;  
otherwise they might turn and be forgiven!’”*

What an odd explanation...to a question that, at the moment, wasn't even asked.

It's almost as if Jesus doesn't want some people to understand.

But that doesn't make sense at all.

So perhaps we need to dig deeper.

And when we do, we note that the words Jesus just shared refer to words that the prophet Isaiah heard long ago when he was called by God and sent to proclaim to the people:

*And [the Lord] said, “Go and say to this people:  
‘Keep listening, but do not comprehend;  
keep looking, but do not understand.’  
Make the mind of this people dull,  
and stop their ears,  
and shut their eyes,  
so that they may not look with their eyes,  
and listen with their ears,  
and comprehend with their minds,  
and turn and be healed.”*

(Isaiah 6:9-10 NRSV)

We have to realize that these words, in many ways, reflect the experience of many, if not most or all, of the prophets as they sought, time and time again, to call the people back to God and hold the people to task in their choices and lifestyles. The prophets could do that all they wanted – until they were blue in the face – but it didn't always, nor maybe often, make a difference, or a lasting difference. And the early church – and the not-so-early church – may very well be heard in the background saying, “Amen to that!”

But instead of hearing these words from Isaiah and Jesus in a prescriptive way, suggesting God must be doing this intentionally; that God must be ‘sticking it to them’, that's why these things happen.

Perhaps it would be better to hear these words as a kind of descriptive theology that would say simply, this is the way things are; this is what life looks like, this is a description of life and what happens. Which may not give us a satisfactory explanation as to why it happens, but simply acknowledges that it does happen this way.

Some people just don't get it.

So that, from a descriptive stance, as soon as we ask the question, “Why don't they get it?”, we realize we're not getting an answer. There is no answer to that question – at least not for us, at least not for now.

Again, yes, it's important to acknowledge, and face up to, the reality that some people don't seem to get it.

But why that is, is not a question we are privy to know – at least here and now. You can put forth explanations in terms of psychological makeup, and societal and familial upbringing,

and the like. But in the end, we don't know. It just is. Try and try as hard as we will, some people just don't get it.

Of course, at the very same time as we ask that question – “Why don't some people get it?” – we may have that same question turned back upon ourselves.

“Why don't we get it?” – at least sometimes.

Why are we hard of hearing and hard of understanding and hard of heart? In other words, why is God's word and God's will and God's kingdom not more evident in us?

And we know the answer to that...at least in part: we are still sinners. We still turn away from God. We still want to do things our way and not God's. We still think we know better than the creator of the universe, who, by the way, is also the very creator of us.

Why don't we get it?

And is there any hope for us?

And what can we do to do better? to turn away from God less and turn toward God more?

And that is a question full of promise.

For instead of pointing at someone else and asking why they don't get it, we can face up to ourselves and address what we can – and cannot – do. And that is a stance that has the very real chance of bearing good fruit: fruit beneficial to ourselves and to others.

And when we ask that question – “Why don't we get it? and What can we do to do better?” – the words of Jesus offer both encouragement and exhortation from various sides of the image(s).

We are exhorted to be open to this word: to be receptive to this way, and this Lord, and this God. To prepare ourselves as best we can to receive this good news and this good word. And remember the way soil is made open to the seed? By plowing: by breaking the upper crust of the soil to let the seed in. And maybe we see that preparation best as we hear that first word of Jesus', “*Repent, and believe.*” Repent: know of your need; know of your need for a different way; and turn toward it, as best you can.

Like that lamp brought in and placed on a lampstand. You may know the lamp is there; you may know the light is shining. But if what you see in your life looks like all shadow and darkness, you may need to recognize that means the light is behind you; so you need to turn around, toward the light.

“*Repent, and believe.*”

Work to avoid being a shallow soil with no depth for root to grow. “For the measure you give...” And if we will not give time and attention and effort, then we may not receive much in return.

And it is not enough to presume you're in the right place at the right time, with some sort of privileged blood-line connection to the gospel. Remember his family who thought the same, yet found themselves on the “*outside.*”

Work to steer clear of the thistles of allure and temptation.

Work to make yourself receptive to this word, and this Lord, who comes to you. So that this goodness and this grace, this love and this life might take root in you, and bear fruit.

And know that it will. Come what may, it will. The light does not stay hidden for long:  
*“For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything concealed, except to come out into the open.”*

The light will shine.

And there will come a harvest, even in you and me. It may not come in those places in the field of your soul that you want it to come – places that may be shallower than you know, or more entangled than you know – but come it will. And grow it will, though you may not always know how. To produce a harvest of fruitfulness out of all proportion to the effort you have put into it or the dreams you have had of it.

A harvest meant for you and for me. A harvest meant for all the world, and all the birds of the air: the bird-brains and the odd ducks, the flamboyant peacocks and the shy chickadees, the majestic eagles and the flitting hummingbirds.

So do not despise sharing this harvest with another, or another, or another; no matter their feather or ilk or kin.

For we are called to share this gospel, this good news, this seed and this light, this Jesus. We are called to do it everywhere. We are called to do it day in and day out. We are called to share it for all needs and all soils and all the birds of the air.

Remembering, as the Apostle Paul once told the Corinthians,

*I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth.* (I Corinthians 3:6 NRSVUE)

We do what we can – sowing, watering, nurturing – but God is the one who brings about growth.

And there will be a harvest. In spite of indications, at various times and various places, that there will be no harvest and that the work we have done has been in vain and is fruitless and futile, “So why go on?” – there will be a harvest, we know not how. But we know to hope. So we hope. We do what we can. And we are patient. Remember: the harvest is coming, not by our doing – even though we do have a part to play. The harvest is coming, not by our doing, but by God’s; for it’s not our kingdom, but God’s; and the ways of the kingdom and the ways of its coming are not our ways, but God’s.

And God will give the growth in us, and through us.

So, *“a sower went out to sow.”*

*“If anyone has ears to hear, let them hear.”*

**\*HYMN** “Open My Eyes, That I May See” GtG 451

*(next page...)*

1. **Open my eyes, that I may see  
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.  
Place in my hands the wonderful key  
that shall unclasp and set me free.  
Silently now I wait for thee,  
ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my eyes; illumine me, Spirit divine!**
  
2. **Open my ears, that I may hear  
voices of truth thou sendest clear.  
And while the wave notes fall on my ear,  
everything false will disappear.  
Silently now I wait for thee,  
ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my ears; illumine me, Spirit divine!**
  
3. **Open my mouth, and let me bear  
gladly the warm truth everywhere.  
Open my heart, and let me prepare  
love with thy children thus to share.  
Silently now I wait for thee,  
ready, my God, thy will to see.  
Open my heart; illumine me, Spirit divine!**

Words and Music (OPEN MY EYES): Clara H. Scott, 1895  
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**\*AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "*A Declaration of Faith*")

**Jesus announced the coming of God's kingdom  
and its hidden presence in the midst of the world's kingdoms.  
He taught his disciples to seek God's kingdom first.  
We believe Christ gives us and demands of us  
lives in pilgrimage toward God's kingdom.  
Like Christ we may enjoy on our journey  
all that sustains life and makes it pleasant and beautiful.  
No more than Christ are we spared  
the darkness, ambiguity, and threat of life in the world.  
We are in the world, but not of the world.  
Our confidence and hope for ourselves and other people  
do not rest in the powers and achievements of this world,  
but in the coming and hidden presence of God's kingdom.**

*(continued...)*



**Christ calls each of us to a life appropriate to that kingdom:  
to serve as he has served us;  
to take up our cross,  
risking the consequences of faithful discipleship;  
to walk by faith, not by sight,  
to hope for what we have not seen.**

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### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE**

One: God of life...  
All: ...hear our prayer.

### **THE EUCHARIST**

#### **OFFERING**

*Invitation*

*Reflection*

*\*Unison Prayer of Dedication*

**Giver of life,  
we do not want the cares of the world and the lure of wealth  
to choke your word among us.  
As the sower casts seeds abundantly, hopefully,  
so we long to participate in your seeding of the world.  
Receive these gifts as tokens of our lives.  
Send your cultivating Spirit to work among us  
until we yield and grow in grace,  
for we pray in the name of Jesus,  
who came out of love for the world. Amen.**

#### **SACRAMENT OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

*Invitation to the Lord’s Table*

*Prayer of Thanksgiving*

Leader: The Lord be with you.  
People: **And also with you.**  
Leader: Lift up your hearts.

*(continued...)*

**People:**        **We lift them to the Lord.**  
**Leader:**      Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.  
**People:**        **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**  
*(The prayer continues...)*

*The Lord's Prayer* (Traditional)

**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 debts,  
as we forgive our debtors;  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.**  
**For thine is the kingdom,  
and the power, and the glory,  
forever. Amen.**

*Breaking of the Bread*

*Communion of the People*

(Please partake of each of the elements as you are served, as an expression of our personal commitment to our Lord.)

**Sing** "Seed, Scattered and Sown" GtG 531

*Refrain:*

**Seed, scattered and sown;  
wheat, gathered and grown;  
bread, broken and shared as one,  
the living bread of God.  
Vine, fruit of the land;  
wine, work of our hands;  
one cup that is shared by all,  
the living cup, the living bread of God.**

**1. Is not the bread we break  
a sharing in our Lord?  
Is not the cup we bless  
the blood of Christ out-poured?** *Refrain:*

*(continued...)*

**2. The seed which falls on rock  
will wither and will die.  
The seed within good ground  
will flower and have life.   *Refrain:***

**3. As wheat upon the hills  
was gathered and was grown,  
so may the church of God  
be gathered into one.   *Refrain:***

Words: Dan Feiten, 1987

Music: SEED SCATTERED, Dan Feiten, 1987; arr. Eric Gunnison and  
R.J. Miller, alt.

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*Prayer*

## **SENDING**

**\*CLOSING HYMN** “A Sower Came from Ancient Hills” GtG 171

**1. A Sower came from ancient hills  
and cast good seed abroad:  
his field, ten thousand human hearts;  
his seed, the word of God.  
And some who listened would not hear,  
and some who heard forgot.  
But some received in fertile soil  
the truth the Sower taught.**

**2. A Sower walked throughout the land  
and, everywhere he trod,  
he sowed his life because he was  
himself the Seed of God.  
But then, atop a barren hill,  
beneath a darkening sky,  
they threw God’s Seed on stony ground  
and left it there to die.**

**3. The Seed was buried deep in death  
beneath a blood-red sky,  
and deeper still was buried hope  
for those who watched him die.**

*(continued...)*

**But then, in Joseph's garden fair,  
as dawn broke o'er the land,  
the Seed, from three days' silent sleep,  
awoke at God's command!**

**4. O Christ, you come among us still,  
the Sower and the Seed.  
As once you sowed the truth of God  
in glowing word and deed,  
implant your Word in waiting hearts,  
and let it there take hold,  
until it bears in fruitful lives  
a harvest hundredfold.**

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**\*CHARGE AND BLESSING**

**One:** ...And let the gathered people of God say...

**All:** ...Amen.

**POSTLUDE**

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