

Sunday July 16, 2017 - 10:00 a.m.

*Please stand if you are able

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

We Gather Around God's Word

Bells and Chimes Call To Worship:

Introit: **"Glorify Thy Name"** (See PowerPoint)

Call to Worship: 🕊️ (Based on Psalm 65:9-13)

L: God visits the earth and waters it

P: Greatly enriching the earth.

L: God waters the earth, softening it with showers,

P: And blessing the earth.

L: Along with the hills, the meadows, and the valleys,

All: Let us shout and sing together for joy!

***Hymn of Praise: #17 v.v. 1, 4 & 5** **"To You, O God, All Creatures Sing"**

***Prayer of Confession:** 🕊️

**Gracious God, we acknowledge that we too often take for granted
your gifts to us: our lives, this world, and your word to us.**

When we receive your word, may we nurture it so that it grows roots within us.

May we not be distracted by the lure of wealth or the cares of the world.

Let us be good soil, receiving your word, understanding it, and acting upon it.

Amen.

***Words of Assurance:** 🕊️

L: We claim what the apostle Paul teaches:

the Spirit of God dwells in you. You are forgiven and free.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

***Hymn of Response : #478** **"I've Got Peace Like a River"**

Passing of God's Peace

In the spirit of peace and the hope of unity,
let us offer each other a sign of Christ's peace!

Special Music: Pastor Karen – **"This Is My Father's World"**

We Engage God's Word

Scripture Readings: Isaiah 55:10-13

(Page 614)

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

(Page 821)

Youth Moment/Lord's Prayer

Reflection: "The Generous Farmer"

Our Gospel reading today is a very familiar passage for most people. During the youth moment I focused on the idea of what we as individuals would be wise to do if we want the word of God to be planted in rich soil in our hearts, but now I want to take our focus in another direction by asking a few questions.

Where is God in this parable; and what is God's action? God is the farmer who sows the seeds. And where does God sow those seeds? Everywhere. We are told that seeds are scattered along the path, in rocky soil, among the weeds, and in fertile soil. Granted the best chance those seeds have for taking root and thriving are in fertile soil, but if we take a look at nature we find that plants can thrive in some of the most unimaginable places. Quite often we see fields where wild flowers and weeds thrive side by side. One of the most striking images that came to mind is how you see trees growing out of a rock cliff. These are no small saplings but full grown trees, standing tall and thriving. The laws of nature say that this shouldn't be. Even if a seed did manage to take root it should have withered and died shortly thereafter, yet there the tree stands.

This parable tells us that God doesn't just plant the Word in hearts that are ready to receive God's word and nurture it, it tells us that God also plants the Word in the hearts of those who don't understand, those who surround themselves with activities and people that choke out the word of God, and in the hearts of those who receive the Word readily, but abandon it at the first sign of trouble or distress. The thing is, I have seen time and time again where God's word has been planted in the heart of someone who just didn't seem to understand the message and it appeared that the evil one snatched the word away, but in reality sometimes the seed that God had planted was just laying dormant only to take root and flourish years later. The seeds that God plants concerning the kingdom of God, yield the fruit of the Spirit which are as the apostle Paul describes but not limited to love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control.

Unfortunately, God is not the only sower in this world. The fact is that there are weeds trying to choke out the message of the kingdom of God even for those who have embraced God's word and have weathered many storms throughout life. Scripture tells us that evil is another force in the world which plants seeds of hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissension, factions and envy, to name a few. I would add to that doubt and fear.

Isaiah tells us that "As the rain and snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. ... Instead of the thorn bush will grow the pine tree, and instead of briars the myrtle will grow." So, what are the thorn bushes and briars of today? Our constant busyness and attachments to non-stop noise and electronics choke out the voice of God. Maybe it is our need for independence and control. We find ourselves unable to "Be still and know that God is God." We see evidence of idolatry not only in the worship of foreign gods, but

in our quest for the almighty dollar and accumulation of things over our worship of the Creator and the care of God's creation. Instead of receiving our firstfruits, God receives our leftovers, that is if there are any left to give whether it be our time, talent, or treasure. Around the world children and adults are being forced into slavery as laborers or sex slaves. There isn't a day that goes by without hearing of war and murder on the news. Locally and worldwide we are still dealing with issues of poverty, racism, drug and alcohol abuse, and abused children, spouses, and dependent adults just to name a few. There is little doubt that the evil one is continuing to this day to plant seeds in an attempt to choke out the fruits of the Spirit yes even in those who have been faithful for years. The images of our crabapple trees blown down remind me of a faithful person who has weathered many difficult storms but this current storm in their life threatens to uproot their faith in God. The roots to those trees, though long and widespread, are not deep.

The evil in this world is a constant threat to uprooting the message of the kingdom of God and the plans that God has for all of creation. Plans for good and not harm and as John 10:10 says ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. Yet Isaiah tells us that the word of God will not return to God empty. So how does God plant the Word?

In the past God revealed the Word to the prophets who in turn passed God's message on to others by word of mouth, through their actions, or by having a scribe write it so it could be passed on to future generations. Sometimes that message would be planted by a vision, a whisper, or in a dream. I believe God still reveals the Word to people with the gift of prophecy today. The most prominent way the Word has been revealed to the earth was in Jesus Christ in both his actions and words, and then sent the Holy Spirit to dwell among us. Today God is still planting the message of the kingdom of heaven that will yield the fruit of the Spirit everywhere through all who will allow God to use them as a vessel. God feeds us and nurtures us through the reading and studying of the scriptures, through our worship of God, and through receiving the sacraments, as well as at times to some people through direct revelation.

So if what is spoken through the prophet Isaiah is true that God's word will achieve the purpose for which it was sent, where is the evidence of the pine tree and myrtle in today's world? Though the number of Christians in the mainline churches throughout America for the most part are decreasing, Christianity worldwide is increasing in numbers and is spreading to areas where it has never been before and in areas where it is forbidden. God is planting seeds of love, joy peace, kindness, goodness, and kindness through relief organizations throughout the world such as the Red Cross, Salvation Army, Doctors without Borders, the Heifer Project, and Church World Services to name a few, which are flourishing because of the joint effort of many individuals.

On a smaller scale you have God planting seeds of the kingdom through caring teachers who instead of yelling at the child who is having an emotional outburst, patiently finds a way to help that child regain self-control, takes notice of stimulus that brings on these outbursts and helps that child learn techniques that will help prevent future outbursts. In this congregation I see evidence as you are willing to worship as entire families and not excluding children from worship because they might be a disruption. Just last Sunday you participated with residents at

Luther Manor to celebrate their birthdays allowing them to experience joy in the music and care and love in the serving of food and drink and just taking the time to sit and listen.

Worldwide, denominations are setting aside their differences in order to work together for the good of the Gospel message. All around us there are signs of the pine trees and myrtle flourishing, if we just have eyes to see and ears to hear.

Almighty God, we thank you for being a generous farmer who plants and waters seeds everywhere giving all the opportunity to allow the Holy Spirit to take root in their hearts. We come to you in Jesus name asking for a right spirit within us that the message of your kingdom may not only be planted in our hearts, but that it may flourish and new seeds be scattered through our words and deeds and that we be willing to scatter them even in the most unlikely places. Help us to be a living Bible for the world to see. Amen.

We Respond to God's Word

Hymn of Response: #519 ***"Standing in the Need of Prayer"***

Sharing Joys, Concerns, and Prayers for the World

Offering Invitation/Offertory/

***Doxology:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise God all creatures here below. Praise God for all that love has done. Creator, Christ and Spirit one. Amen.

***Prayer of Dedication:** (In Unison)

Gracious God, filled by your generosity to us, we freely respond generously with offerings of treasure, time and our very lives so that others may be blessed. Pour out your blessings upon all that we have to offer and guide the use of our offerings that they may be used for your purposes and to scatter the seeds of the Gospel in word and deed. Amen.


We Are Sent Into the World

Sending Hymn:** ***"Lord Be Glorified" (See PowerPoint)

*** Benediction and Response:**

GO NOW IN PEACE

Don Besig and Nancy Price. Music and text © 1988, 1989, Harold Flammer Music, a division of Shawnee Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted under One License #A-611234

 indicates these prayers have been taken from or adapted from a service written by the Rev. Ruth Garwood, ordained Minister in the United Church of Christ. Rev. Garwood is a certified leader of InterPlay, a system of forms in movement, story-telling and vocalizing that brings body and soul together, and brings communities together. She teaches suicide first aid via Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training. Copyright 2017 Local Church Ministries, Faith Formation Ministry Team, United Church of Christ, 700 Prospect Avenue, Cleveland, OH 44115-1100. Permission granted to reproduce or adapt this material for use in services of worship or church education. All publishing rights reserved.