

**CELEBRATING GOD'S LOVE ON SUNDAY JULY 12, 2020**

**GOD'S PEOPLE GATHER**

CHIMES

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

O God of peace, you have taught us that in returning and rest we shall be renewed.

**In quietness and confidence we shall be made stronger.**

By the might of your Spirit lift us, we pray, to your presence.

**Where we may be still and know that you are God.**

Let us worship God now in quietness and song, in word and in prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

**Gracious God, we thank you for your promise to be with us always and especially when we are gathered together for worship. May our silence, our prayers and our songs be witnesses to your hope for this world. We listen for your voice now in all that we say and do and think, that by doing so we may hope to move closer to your justice, reconciliation and peace. Amen.**

\*HYMN #560

“We Plow the Fields and Scatter”

CALL TO CONFESSION

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**Almighty God, source of all the good that we can ever know, we are saddened to discover that we are often not very good soil for your seeds. We confess today that we have been less than you created us to be. Prepare us for the healing that you offer our troubled spirits. May we be the soil that sprouts your seeds of love, joy and peace. May we faithfully strive to understand your ways in order to nurture the good that is within us. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.**

A TIME OF QUIET/PERSONAL CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PARDON

\*RESPONSE “Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying”

*Lord, listen to your children praying, Lord send your Spirit in this place; Lord, listen to your children praying, send us love us, send us power, send us grace.*

PASSING THE PEACE

The peace of Christ be with you! **And also with you.**

Now fold your hands in front of your heart and bow to your neighbors near and far, wishing them God's peace, God's Shalom.

**WE HEAR GOD'S WORD**

GOSPEL

READING Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 (p.690)

SERMON

“What Kind of Soil Are You?”

I don't know about you, but I'm not much of a gardener. I do my best, but I don't always take the best care of my plants. For Mother's Day this year, David got me a plant I'd never seen before. It had little pink blossoms on it and it almost looked like an evergreen. I read the tag and it said it grows well in regions 7-9, but if you're north of there, which we are, you can put it outside in the summer. So that's what I did. And it promptly died. It could be because I didn't take it out of the little pot that it came in and it got too dry... But I can say that I am proud of my hostas which I planted 2 summers ago and now they are really big and blooming. They seem to do fine on their own which is probably why I like them so much. And I was also proud of myself for spreading

some grass seed out on the part of our backyard that doesn't get a lot of sun because of the trees. For now at least the grass seems to be doing much better.

Gardening is hard work! By the hard work of a few willing and able gardeners at Faith Church, there are tomatoes and peppers growing out back again. Last year we wanted to get the preschoolers involved with the garden. The plan was to have the children plant the seeds inside so they could watch them grow, and then move them out to the garden. Good thing we listened to master gardener Jan who told us there wouldn't be enough light in the classrooms for those seeds to sprout, or we would have had a lot of disappointed children. I admit though I have many memories of bringing home Dixie cups with seeds that I had planted in school or Sunday School or Girl Scouts. I would put the little cup on the kitchen counter, flood it with too much water and then watch and wait for the little green shoot to appear. And it was really exciting when it did! Its own little miracle right there in that little paper cup.

So we talk a lot in the church about planting seeds by doing good and reaching out. We're pretty familiar with that image. But we don't often think about the soil. In this story Jesus told, we are the soil and God is the gardener sowing the seeds. You may have a hunch of what kind of seeds God wants to plant. How about the fruit of the spirit here: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. That list could last us a lifetime! God wants to give us these gifts. So the challenge before us is receiving them well and that means we have to be good soil.

So what can we learn from all the places where the seeds landed? I'm talking about first the path, then the rocky ground, the thorns and finally the good soil. Notice that the sower doesn't aim the seed in one direction or the other. He scatters it so it lands all over the place. This is God's abundance, this great feast that we are offered. And then it's up to us to be good soil so that God's seeds will grow inside of us.

So first some of the seeds fall along the path. Here's our path today. These are bricks from the commemorative garden. They represent the love and care that went into making that garden and they also represent persistence. When the seeds landed on the path, the birds came and ate them up. So the path reminds us that in order to get things done before the seeds get eaten up, we need to persist. I read the plaque in the parlor by the door and learned that the garden was dedicated in September 2000 thanks to some hard work, and many gifts, most in memory of loved ones, but a few in honor of loved ones and one in celebration of a 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. And then many other people gave anonymous gifts. It took persistence to make that garden and even more persistence to add the Memorial Garden in 2013. And then the circle of stones was laid in May 2016 as a Troop 490 Eagle Scout Project. Lots of different people over a course of 20 years have persisted in caring for the garden. What a wonderful witness to the beauty of God's creation and the persistence of Faith Church!

So back in Jesus' day, a teacher, like Jesus, would tell a story, like a parable, and then the rabbis would interpret it. If you've got a Bible nearby, open to Matthew 13 and you look at verses 18-23: that's basically the rabbis' interpretation of the parable. And remember that the church and the synagogue were almost inseparable at the point these words were written. The church grew out of the synagogue, but it hadn't become a separate entity yet. So according to the rabbis, the seed that lands on the path gets snatched away because of a lack of understanding. I think often the best way to understand something, is to act on it. If we think we don't understand love, do something loving. If we think we don't understand patience, let's challenge ourselves to do something that requires patience. Let's persist all the way through this journey of life God has given us so that we can learn how to be that good soil.

The second place the seeds land is on rocky ground. And the problem with rocky ground is that it's hard for those roots to dig down deep. It takes time to put down roots but it's so important. What do you and I do to keep our faith strong? It's an understatement to say that 2020 has been a challenge so far! But the good news is that Faith Church is strong! I know that several times over the years you've done some visioning work because I've read the notes. Three years ago you were working on the Vision 2020 plan; at least session was working on it. There were 3 priorities that came out of this vision. The first was to do more hands-on mission opportunities. And you've done that with going to the House of Bread and the Dayton Foodbank. The second priority was to develop a shepherding ministry. And you've done that too. I'm talking about the *Faith Cares* ministry that the deacons put together. And the third priority that came out of your Vision 2020 was to improve the use of technology in the church. We were forced to do that when the pandemic hit back in March. How many people watched at least one YouTube worship service between March and May? I can't see your hands raised, but if you're watching me now, your hand should be up.

So back to the soil... if the plants manage to get their roots down deep, they also have to watch out for thorns which could choke them. The rabbis tell us that the thorns represent the worries of life and the deceitfulness of wealth. When we had our Holy Conversations you talked about things you were worried about. Everybody is getting older, lots of people aren't interested in church anymore; families have lots of commitments competing for their time. And you were worried about finances. But you also talked about resources and places of hope in the church. You have a perfect location and lots of land. You love each other. You still have energy and a desire to do good in the world. You have a strong outreach ministry and some really great music... Doing this kind of visioning work is so important, especially when it seems like the thorns are creeping up all around us. So let's encourage one another today, call somebody up and remind them that even in the midst of this pandemic, Faith Church is doing really well.

And so finally some of the seeds land in good soil where they produce a great crop beyond anyone's imagination. The good soil is the people who hear the word and understand it. Again I see understanding as much more than head knowledge. It's more like heart knowledge. And knowing something in our heart motivates us to do something about it. The good news today is that there's lots of good soil at Faith Church. Those tomato and pepper plants out back are thriving, and so is the commemorative garden. But more importantly God has sown his seeds in our hearts. Yes sometimes those rocks and those thorns get the better of us. We're not perfect. But more often than not those seeds that God throws our way land in the good soil. How will you and I be good soil for God's seeds this week? Let's take that question into our hearts and turn it into some heart knowledge. And watch those seeds grow. Amen.

#### SPECIAL MUSIC

##### PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Pastoral Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

##### OFFERING OUR GIFTS

Call to the Offering

\*Doxology

***Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; Praise Christ, all people here below; Praise Holy Spirit evermore; Praise Triune God, whom we adore. Amen.***

\*PRAYER OF DEDICATION

**All good gifts around us come from you, O God. You have given us life and new life in Christ. As you have given us gifts, so we offer our gifts that we may be gifts to one another, even as Jesus so taught and lived. Amen.**

\*HYMN #536

“Lord, Make Us More Holy”

\*BENEDICTION

\*RESPONSE “The Spirit Sends Us Forth to Serve”

*We go to be the hands of Christ, to scatter joy like seed And, all our days, to cherish life, to do the loving deed.*

POSTLUDE

Popcorn with the Pastor continues on Tuesdays at 6:30 PM. Join in for a time of informal conversation over Zoom. If you would like to learn how to use Zoom and/or receive the link to join the call, please contact Pastor Julia or Don Niece.