

Worship Resources - Sowing Seeds - <https://youtu.be/1JrPYb6RDNO>

6th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

12^h July, 2020

Isaiah 55:10-13 CEV / Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 CEV

Intro/Prelude, *I Am Loved*, Words by William J. & Gloria Gaither, music by William J. Gaither, played by church musician Annie Center, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246

Call to Worship/Welcome

We come together from many places and many circumstances this morning, all of us seeking something. Something different from the norm, something extraordinary. What drives us to reach beyond ourselves is unique to each of us, yet we come together in community as seekers, working with each other to find meaning, guidance, and something more than what the world around us has to offer.

As a fellow pilgrim on this journey, I'm glad to welcome you to online worship with Olympic View Community Church. We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love.

Part of our tradition is a commitment to share words of peace and welcome with each other when we gather. This morning, let us consider the following poem, *The Peace of Wild Things*, by Wendell Berry:

The Peace of Wild Things

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life
and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water,
and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives
with forethought of grief.
I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light.
For a time I rest in the grace of the world,
and am free.

— Wendell Berry

May we always give thought as to where we find the peaceful still water, and how do we provide that same tranquility for others.

Today, for our invocation prayer, we have a well-known hymn, Spirit of the Living God, performed by the group FFH. Let's take a deep breath, quiet our minds and hearts, as we listen to the lyrics seeking the divine spirit's presence among us.

Interlude Video - *Spirit Of The Living God*, performed by FFH,
posted to YouTube by Dean Watson,
used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=18I5G5jygoY>

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us. Amen.

In our first scripture reading this morning from the prophet Isaiah, he describes the fruit of the seeds that God plants among us. Here these words of the prophet.

Words of the Prophet Isaiah 55:10-13 CEV

“Rain and snow fall from the sky. But they don’t return without watering the earth that produces seeds to plant and grain to eat.

That’s how it is with my words. They don’t return to me without doing everything I send them to do.”

When you are set free, you will celebrate and travel home in peace. Mountains and hills will sing as you pass by, and trees will clap.

Cypress and myrtle trees will grow in fields once covered by thorns. And then those trees will stand as a lasting witness to the glory of the Lord.

Scripture Video - Isaiah 55:10-13 - *God's Words Are Powerful*

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PzKJ3bcaWe8>

A Time of Prayer

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer. If you would like to share a request to be included

in our communal prayer time, please leave a comment in the video below, or email myself at: vicarglenn@gmail.com, and I'll make sure to include that request in next week's service, as well as send a prayer chain email, if you would like.

Joys and Concerns

This morning we lift up in prayer our church secretary Anita's mother, Lila LaFranchi, as she has had a recent health setback. We pray for continued strength and comfort, not only for Lila, but her family as well.

We also remember Bill and JoAnne Shoemaker's granddaughter who has been stuck in Kenya and had been ill with malaria. Please keep her in prayer that her health continues to improve, and that the embassy can work out a way for her to return home. Also keep Bill in you prayers as his physical strength has suffered with not being able to exercise as he had been with facilities no longer available due to the pandemic.

I would also express joy for those among us who are able to enjoy a little more freedom to get out and safely socialize more, also praying that all involved take the appropriate steps to ensure all remain healthy.

Continue to keep Grace Edmark in prayer as she continues to adjust to her new reality at Northaven.

Also, let's include Matthew in our prayers. He's been sick for weeks with intestinal issues, and has suffered the loss of both his paternal grandparents to COVID19.

Isaac could also use prayer. It is a blessing that he recently got a new job, but now has to move out of his grandmother's residence and find a place to live since she doesn't want the potential exposure to COVID19.

Also keep Leilyah in prayer as she may have contracted the virus, and continue to keep all those who are now sick with COVID19 in prayer.

Let's take these prayers, and those we may keep in our heart, to God in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Secure our steps, O God — on rough terrain, on shifting sands, on fine, wide roads, on narrow paths. Make our footsteps firm.

Secure our steps, O God — in the boardroom, at the water cooler, in the school yard, in the checkout line. Make our footsteps firm.

Secure our steps, O God — chasing after deadlines, trailing after toddlers, scrambling toward the finish line, clamoring for security. Make our footsteps firm.

Secure our steps, O God — pacing through hospitals, wandering through the hurt, tripping over the unforeseen, meandering through the grief. Make our footsteps firm.
Amen.

In our gospel lesson this morning is Jesus tells a parable about a sower sowing seeds on various soil, and how that soil affects their growth. Let's give some thought as we hear these words on what kind of soil we might be, and what the quality of our yield has been.

Gospel Reading Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 CEV

That same day Jesus left the house and went out beside Lake Galilee, where he sat down to teach.

Such large crowds gathered around him that he had to sit in a boat, while the people stood on the shore.

Then he taught them many things by using stories. He said: A farmer went out to scatter seed in a field.

While the farmer was scattering the seed, some of it fell along the road and was eaten by birds.

Other seeds fell on thin, rocky ground and quickly started growing because the soil wasn't very deep.

But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched and dried up, because they did not have enough roots.

Some other seeds fell where thornbushes grew up and choked the plants.

But a few seeds did fall on good ground where the plants produced a hundred or sixty or thirty times as much as was scattered.

If you have ears, pay attention!

Gospel Video Matthew 13:1-9,18-23 - A Story About A Farmer

(Parable Of The Sower) | Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKMQLVnZhRM>

Message – Sowing Seeds

Often when I read the scriptures, particularly the stories from the Gospels, I reflect on how much some things have changed from how they were done back in Jesus' day.

Take farming, for example, the aspect of life that Jesus makes use of in this morning's parable. Jesus tells us, "Listen! A sower went out to sow." Pretty simple. Much simpler than today. Over the centuries, farming has evolved greatly from what it would have been in first century Palestine. As our understanding of what factors increase productivity and yield has increased, so has our efficiency and methods. In the last couple centuries, we have made great strides in improving output and quality. It began with steam tractors around the turn of the century.

Internal combustion engine tractors really took off after that. But even then, machines didn't outnumber horses for farming until 1955. Eventually, of course, the machines have largely taken over in North America, with the exception of the farms of some of our Mennonite and Amish kin. And the revolution of the tractor has only been a part of the overall farm revolution. Add in hybrid seeds, irrigation systems, fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides, computer controls, and so much more, and the United States has become the most efficient and productive farming culture in human history. Now go back to the simple beginning of Jesus' parable: "Listen! A sower went out to sow." That's it! No machines. Not even a plow or an oxen. Simply a man flinging seeds around everywhere in a field. Not exactly efficient, productive farming — certainly not by our standards. What I'd like for us to consider for a moment, though, is whether or not this sower was being efficient even by the standards of his day. Even in Jesus' day, there were things that the farmer did to prepare his field first, some not that different from things we do in farming today. First, you pick out as many of the rocks as you can and stack them off to the side. You pull weeds, and those you can't pull, you plow them under, along with the hard beaten down paths that people may have tread in your field. But as Jesus goes on with this parable, it seems evident that the field hasn't been prepared at all. There's beaten-down, hard paths; there's rocks; there's thorny weeds. If those things are taken care of before going out into the field, then sowing your seed had a much greater chance of finding good soil and to bearing fruit. But this sower doesn't seem to have done that. He simply goes out and starts flinging the seed everywhere. From a farming perspective, it just doesn't seem to make sense. Why would Jesus tell a story with such a ridiculous premise?

There's a story about a boy's experience in Sunday school with the parables and stories of Jesus. It's a true story; only the names have been changed to protect the embarrassed. Little Tommy attended first grade Sunday School faithfully. He loved his teacher, Mrs. Smith. Mrs. Smith told great Bible stories, and she would always end the story by saying, "And, boys and girls, the MORAL of the story is ..." Little Tommy enjoyed learning about the morals of each Bible story. But when Tommy entered second grade, he moved up to another Sunday School class, taught by Mrs. Jones. She told Bible stories, too, but she never ended them by giving the moral of the story. After a few weeks Tommy's mom asked him how he liked his new Sunday School teacher. Tommy said, "Mrs. Jones is okay. The only problem is that she doesn't have any morals."

The problem here is that we most often approach Jesus' parables as if they are the most reasonable of teaching devices, stories with a clear cut meaning to discern. I think that's a mistake because I think he meant his parables to be absurd. But is that really his intention, or is it more to make us pause and think "what is he talking about?" Listen, for example, to what Jesus says to his audience in the verses we skipped over this morning in Matthew 18. He tells us flat out what he is trying to do with his parables: "The reason I speak to them in parables," says Jesus, "is that 'seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.' With 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. For 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 in turn – and I would heal them.”

With our minds and senses dulled by our human understanding from a perspective of worldly logic, Jesus needs to get our attention first, and that’s precisely what he does with his parables — tell us stories about things like a sower who goes out and flings his seed any old-where. How is it that we usually look at the parables? We think of our favorites — the Good Samaritan, the Prodigal Son, the Good Shepherd — and we tend to think, “Hey, wasn’t Jesus such a wonderful teacher? So clear and precise in getting home his point with images and stories?” But we have grown so accustomed to these stories that the shock value is largely lost on us.

Productive shepherds, for example, absolutely do not abandon 99 sheep to go off looking for one lost sheep. Is that the choice you would make if you raised livestock. Would you leave your flock vulnerable to predators and danger to save just one? You would probably count that poor lamb as lost so as to not risk losing anymore. And the so-called Good Samaritan was a contradiction in terms for Jesus’ Jewish audience. Samaritans were their enemies, and they didn’t count any of them as good. And what about that Prodigal Son? Well, what’s really surprising in this story is not so much that a young son would make mistakes, prodigally wasting his father’s money. No, that’s quite common, isn’t it? What’s surprising is how easily the father welcomes him home afterward! From the standpoint of the elder son, who had remained faithful to his father, his father was the prodigal one, wasting such love on a ne'er do well son. In fact, maybe that’s a similar point as the one of today’s parable. Jesus tells us about a Prodigal Sower, one who seemingly wastes most of his seed on soil that isn’t going to produce much, if anything. This sower doesn’t seem to care where he throws his seed. But, if Jesus is trying to teach us not about farming, but about God’s kin-dom, then the Prodigal Sower image becomes a fitting one to shock us into hopefully being able to hear and see and understand that God’s kin-dom is radically different than what we might expect it to be. And so we need to see and hear and understand that Jesus’ parables weren’t simply nice, clear teaching devices. They are meant to teach us something. But I think they are more to help us unlearn things before we can properly understand them from God's perspective.

We need to unlearn before we can learn when it comes to the kin-dom of God. We tend to want to think about it in terms of our human sensibilities, not understanding that God’s perspective may be totally different from what we consider to be the “norm.” Our natural inclination often is to make these parables journeys of introspection. There is a lot of emphasis in this particular one concerning the varieties of soil upon which seed may fall. We can easily see ourselves fitting into one category or another, or perhaps all of them in different seasons of our lives. We can identify with the seed on rocky soil that grows quickly and enthusiastically, but then dies out just as quickly.

I think of the believer who revels in the charisma and spirituality of their own path, swaying enthusiastically to the praise choruses and eager to perform meditative and charismatic spiritual practices, yet never takes root in community or bears fruit outside themselves. Or the believer in a bed of thorns, who starts committed growth but tries too hard to make

that fit into the expectations of the world around them. We, like those in the original audience for this parable, can easily identify with these concepts. They are valuable reflections for sure, but not ones uncommon from those already present in most of our lives. To focus just on our own journey misses the obvious absurdity meant to get our attention in the first place, the sower who carelessly wastes seed by tossing it any old place, regardless of its potential to be productive. Would we be any different?

When we think of evangelism and outreach, what is our approach? We generally go into it with a certain expectation, don't we? We identify our ideal demographic, our ideal geography, all the factors we would find most advantageous. We're always looking for those elusive young families, the bedrock of stability and continued growth. We seek that fertile soil that will help us grow as a community and organization. Is that the proper perspective though? Is that what we are to glean from this parable? Jesus is trying to get our attention by providing us with the seeming absurdity of planting seed randomly with no clear plan and preparation.

What if God is the sower, and the real point is that the importance is continually sowing the seeds without regards to potential cultivation? How would that change our approach? Outreach just for the sake of outreach. Showing love and sharing peace without expectation. Our own journeys of discipleship should mirror that commitment to sowing seeds in any soil, not just what is most advantageous to us. That is certainly a lesson we are learning with the restrictions of today's world. We have no control over who may choose to tune in to our YouTube worship. We have no idea what soil this seed may be falling on, and what fruit it may produce that we will never see, and never harvest ourselves.

Maybe the lesson we are to learn is to give up that worldly goal of defining our success as sowers by the crop that we produce. Perhaps success is planting the most seeds in the most places possible. Quite the contrary to what we are used to but the kingdom often is that way, isn't it? Can we give up our own need to see the fruit of our efforts, and just focus on doing the job we are called to? I hope we can find effective ways, as individuals and as a community of faith, to spread seeds of hope and love far and wide, in every arena we find available. We may never know what soil they fall in, but there is one constant that holds true to the kingdom and the world we live in. There is no growth without a seed. May we become the sowers we are called to be. Amen.

Call to Serve.

This is how the earth praises God: giving thanks for God's abundance!
The meadows clothe themselves with flocks and the valleys deck themselves with shimmering fields of grain, sharing their bounty with the rest of creation. We, too, are to worship God by being abundant and fruitful with our lives, offering up our yields as if they were songs of joyful praise. Let us worship God with our gifts.

As we continue to seek to sow our own seeds in our community, we ask that you give prayerful consideration as to how you may support our efforts. If you would like to make a donation, gifts can still be mailed to our church office, or online donations can be made through the link in the video description. Thanks again for all your support, and may we continue to work together to keep being a place of ministry and peace where seeds are planted that bear fruit in these lean times. As we watch the following video, *Planting Seeds: A Song of Life* by nimo featuring daniel nahmod, let's give some thought not only to the seeds we plant, or should plant, and what expectations for twe may have for those seeds.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *Planting Seeds: A Song of Life*

Empty Hands Music

nimo feat. daniel nahmod

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AmqYcWjBmc>

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Gracious God, filled by your generosity to us, may we be generous to others. Accept from us these gifts of word and money as we commit our lives to you. **Amen.**

Blessing/Assurance

The God of Seed and Harvest, the Divine Sower, blesses you, And we bless each other That the beauty of this world And the love that created it Might be expressed though our lives And be a blessing to others As we sow our own seeds on whatever ground is before us. **Amen.**

Sending

As we extinguish this candle, the visual representation of God's spirit at work within and among our uis, let us carry this inside each one of us this week, letting it guide us to lives focused on spreading the seeds of God's kin-dom and justice in everything we say and do. **Amen.**

Postlude - *Lamb of Glory*, Words & music by Greg Nelson & Phill McHugh, played by church musician Annie Center, used and reported under CCLI Streaming License 20261246
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC8S4hrI2Ko>