

Worship Resources - **Growing Like a Weed** - https://youtu.be/KGOPhh_AbAk

8th Sunday of Pentecost, Year A,

26th July, 2020

1 Kings 3:5-12 CEV / Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 CEV

Intro/Prelude *Come and See*, played by church musician Annie Center
https://youtu.be/_20paDKvY6I

Call to Worship/Welcome

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.

What mysteries there are in God's world!

We, so sophisticated, stand in awe at the wonders of the natural world.

We look at the tiniest of seeds and wonder what will happen

From that small seed will grow a large shrub.

Although we consider our gifts to be small and insignificant,

God will use our gifts in miraculous ways. We praise the God of small seeds and mighty power as we join in worship together.

Part of our tradition is a commitment to share words of peace and welcome with each other when we gather. This morning as we listen to the following musical rendition of a well-known prayer attributed to St. Francis, let us reflect on how we are instruments of peace in our own lives, and those we may know who could benefit from a word or act of shalom today.

Passing the Peace of Christ

Make Me A Channel of Your Peace
Make me a channel of your peace
Where there is hatred let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon Lord
And where there's doubt, true faith in you
Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Oh, master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OE44Et-FyRg>

Make me a channel of your peace
It isn't pardoning that we are pardoned
In giving to all men let we receive
And in dying that we're born to eternal life

Oh, master grant that I may never seek
So much to be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love with all my soul

Make me a channel of your peace
Where there's despair in life let me bring hope
Where there is darkness, only light
And where there's sadness ever joy

Invocation

Join me in a word of prayer.

God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meager lives and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving kindness for you in this world. You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear. You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness. Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us. Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

We light a candle today to represent the Spirit burning within us, and among us, guiding our time together. (light candle) Amen.

Our First Testament reading this morning tells of Solomon's request of wisdom from God. As we listen to these words from First Kings, let's think about where we seek our wisdom as we discern the will of God.

First Testament Reading - 1 Kings 3:5-12 CEV

One night while Solomon was in Gibeon, the Lord God appeared to him in a dream and said, "Solomon, ask for anything you want, and I will give it to you."

Solomon answered: My father David, your servant, was honest and did what you commanded. You were always loyal to him, and you gave him a son who is now king.

Lord God, I'm your servant, and you've made me king in my father's place. But I'm very young and know so little about being a leader.

And now I must rule your chosen people, even though there are too many of them to count.

Please make me wise and teach me the difference between right and wrong. Then I will know how to rule your people. If you don't, there is no way I could rule this great nation of yours.

God said: Solomon, I'm pleased that you asked for this. You could have asked to live a long time or to be rich. Or you could have asked for your enemies to be destroyed. Instead, you asked for wisdom to make right decisions.

So I'll make you wiser than anyone who has ever lived or ever will live.

Scripture Video 1 Kings 3:5-12

The Lord Makes Solomon Wise

Lectionary bible reading

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1bx4kCibfWM>

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 remember our church secretary Anita, her sisters and their families, with the passing of their mother Lila this week. May they feel the presence of God's comfort and strength in the days ahead

We also continue to keep Patti Berg in our prayers with the passing of her sister Neva last week.

We also lift up Grace Edmark, who was admitted to the hospital this week with several underlying health issues. May God's healing, strength, and guidance be felt by Grace, her family and caregivers.

This morning we are thankful and joyous for summer weather, but also pray that all continue to act safely, showing the love and concern for our neighbor that we are called to.

Finally, we pray for those who fight against injustice, as well as those in positions to exact change. May they both work to undo oppression and seek peaceful change.

Join me in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Teach me Your ways, O God, that I may come down from my heights and be open to the same Spirit who moved over the face of the waters in the first day of creation and moves also over the chaos of this time to fashion a day like this, a world like ours, a life like mine, a kin-dom acting as leaven in the bread of earth. And make me aware of the miracles of life, of warm and cold, of starkness and order, of screaming wind and impenetrable silences, and of the unfathomable mystery of amazing grace in which I am kept. Teach me Your ways, O God, that I may praise You for all the surprising, ingenious ways You bless me, and for all the wondrous gifts You give me, along with all the pain and joy I sustain. Teach me Your ways, O God,

that I may accept my own talent openly, nurture it hopefully, develop it faithfully, and give it freely. Teach me Your ways, O God, that I may love Your kindness and practice it toward the hungry of the world, the poor and sick, and oppressed, that I may learn the healing humility that comes from You. Teach me Your ways, O God, so that my heart is flooded with Your mercy—emptying it of what makes it firmly opposed to Your ways, so that it beats more in rhythm with You and pounds greatly for Your kin-dom. Amen.

Jesus tells several parables in our reading from Matthew this morning. As you listen to these stories, think about what they have in common, and what they may be saying about how God works in the world around us.

Gospel Reading Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 CEV

Jesus told them another story: The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a farmer plants a mustard seed in a field.

Although it is the smallest of all seeds, it grows larger than any garden plant and becomes a tree. Birds even come and nest on its branches.

Jesus also said: The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a woman mixes a little yeast into three big batches of flour. Finally, all the dough rises.

The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when someone finds a treasure hidden in a field and buries it again. A person like that is happy and goes and sells everything in order to buy that field.

The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a shop owner is looking for fine pearls.

After finding a very valuable one, the owner goes and sells everything in order to buy that pearl.

The kingdom of heaven is like what happens when a net is thrown into a lake and catches

When the net is full, it is dragged to the shore, and the fishermen sit down to separate the fish. They keep the good ones, but throw the bad ones away.

That's how it will be at the end of time. Angels will come and separate the evil people from the ones who have done right.

Then those evil people will be thrown into a flaming furnace, where they will cry and grit their teeth in pain.

Jesus asked his disciples if they understood all these things. They said, "Yes, we do."

So he told them, "Every student of the Scriptures who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like someone who brings out new and old treasures from the storeroom."

Gospel Video - Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52 - *Five Stories*

Lectionary bible reading

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

Message – Growing Like a Weed

A gardener, prompted by curiosity, counted the seed pods on a medium-sized mustard plant. There were 85. The average number of seeds in each pod was eight. Since two crops in a given year could be matured, the gardener figured that it was possible in the interim between February and mid-October to produce a yield of 462,000 seeds, all from one original plant. That's quite a load of seeds. It's no wonder that weeds are often the bane of many a farmer and homeowner's existence. They seem to spread like wildfire and threaten to choke out our food crops, or take over our well manicured lawns. We pull them, spray chemicals to kill them, but they just keep coming back.

It is particularly obvious now here in Seattle, with the reduction of routine landscaping service in many public areas. Many small parks have become jungles of overgrown weeds. We often look and see such scenes as places in need of a lot of work, to get back to the orderly, kept ideal we have of what is desirable and beautiful to behold, Yet in our parable this morning from Matthew, that's what Jesus is talking about. What we may not know today, but what the early listeners hearing this parable would have most likely understood, is that the mustard plant is a weed that grows like a bush and spreads. It's a very invasive weed. Jesus is comparing the Kingdom of Heaven to a plant that will constantly and inevitably keep growing and spreading. Have you ever seen ivy on an old house, taking it over completely? That's what the Kingdom of Heaven is like. Jesus uses this imagery to illustrate how the Kingdom of Heaven will spread like the most invasive of weeds, gradually overtaking the carefully planned and tended fields of humankind. And that's an interesting perspective to look at.

In farming, crops are planted and fertilized according to the wisdom and experience of generations of farmers. From years of trial and error, these are the accepted methods of rotation, water, and nurture that have yielded the best results, and are accepted as common knowledge and common sense. Yet we can carry that metaphor to think about what we think of as common sense, as just the way things are done, yet Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom of Heaven often acts in the opposite way to what the world thinks is right and normal. Instead of crops, He lifts up invasive weeds as the model. Plants that will invade and choke out what we would normally value as good and right.

He makes a similar statement in his next parable about yeast. When we think of yeast, most of us would picture a packet of powder that we pick up at the store, mix with some water, and add to flour, salt, and shortening, and make loaves of bread. Yet for his listeners in his time, leavening was often viewed negatively. Leavening was something that people understood in scripture as unclean or evil. There were no packets of yeast to buy at the store. In order to make yeast, you had to let bread go bad, just bad enough to get yeasty but not fully rot. It wasn't a pleasant process. Then, as today, in that part of the world, they eat mostly different types of flatbread that don't require leavening and yeast. Yet just a tiny bit of that yeast can make a big batch of good flour rise and bubble. But mustard

bushes and yeasty risen dough are the end results of the Kingdom of Heaven spreading everywhere. It's important not to lose sight of how it all starts.

The mustard seed is a very tiny seed, one of the tiniest. It takes the smallest amount of yeast to start a chain reaction that can make a full loaf of bread. That's the first point that Jesus is trying to make here. Too often we focus on the Kingdom at the end of our road, and forget that work we're called to in this life. To live in such a way that we spread little bits of the Kingdom where we are on this Earth.

Jesus is telling us that if we spread our share of these tiny seeds, these little bits of yeast, and they slowly spread out into other places. Jesus is telling us that the Kingdom starts out small like a mustard seed and grows into a tree that shelters and nurtures life around it. When that small mustard seed starts growing, it has an advantage, because it can grow in and around the landscape, sheltering those beneath it and giving a place to perch for those above it.

This, too, is how the gospel is spread in communities where seeds, as tiny as they may be, are spread in their present landscape. A small sprout here and there, and suddenly the place is alive with people in the community being nurtured by the spread of the gospel and the Kingdom drawing near. Those seeds that have the most growth often aren't what we think of as evangelizing, going door to door for example.

Proclaiming the gospel takes many forms that aren't verbal. As Francis of Assisi used to say, "Preach the Gospel at all times, when necessary, use words." It's getting out in the community and seeing what weeds grow best. It's finding the needs and meeting them. It's being a valuable member of one's community that actively makes a difference while not hiding the motivation of the Gospel behind those actions. Yet what is defined as success in God's Kingdom, is often not what we're taught by our culture to value. We might think, "Oh I'm just part of a little church. We can't do much, so why bother?" As Lou F. McNeil in his essay on Christianity in Appalachia puts it, "When one's thinking begins with the parish and its members, rather than the gospel itself, it is likely that ministry and planning will not get beyond the parish and its membership."

As I look at congregational profiles across our denomination, one consistent goal they all have is growth. Yet so many hesitate to do anything outside the church doors. The quote I referenced about Christianity in Appalachia reminds me of the Episcopal church I preached at occasionally in eastern Kentucky. It was a good Sunday if we had 8 or 10 people show up. Yet that church ran a food bank that provided for hundreds of people. They had a thrift shop next to the church that often supplied those same people with donated furniture or appliances for cheap. They served soup and sandwiches every month to struggling students at the nearby community college. They found a way to spread the Kingdom on a shoestring budget, with a half time priest that was only there two Sundays a month, which by the way is how this Brethren pastor got roped into preaching on the other two Sundays for free. The focus of the church should be spreading the Gospel, seeking God's direction in

what seeds of the Kingdom we are called to plant. Growth will follow as God directs.

As Paul models in 1 Corinthians 3:6, “I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow.” But we need to be out there, planting seeds, or recognizing the seeds already planted by God that don't meet our expectations of what kin-dom growth looks like. Like many a homeowner who fights the troublesome dandelions taking over the yard, what we may see as an annoyance may be the very opportunity we are being given. The homeless person on the doorstep may be a mustard seed of the kin-dom, not something that needs pulled up and discarded.

Like Solomon in our passage from 1 Kings today, we need to see wisdom and discernment from God, not necessarily the “common sense” we are used to. But it's important to know the difference between wisdom and intelligence.

That reminds me of a story I heard once. A minister, a Boy Scout, and a computer expert were the only passengers on a small plane. The pilot came back to the cabin and said that the plane was going down but there were only three parachutes and four people. The pilot added, “I should have one of the parachutes because I have a wife and three small children.” So he took one and jumped. The computer whiz said, “I should have one of the parachutes because I am the smartest man in the world and everyone needs me.” So he took one and jumped. The minister turned to the Boy Scout and with a sad smile said, “You are young and I have lived a rich life, so you take the remaining parachute, and I'll go down with the plane.” The boy Scout said, “Relax, Reverend, the smartest man in the world just picked up my knapsack and jumped out! The one with the PHD isn't necessarily the one with the greatest wisdom. Sometimes it's the one with the simple approach, untainted by complex methods of reasoning, that better discerns God's will.

Sometimes we don't know what to do with the section of God's Kingdom that we've been given. Even right now, we are in flux – we don't know what the future holds for the church. Across all denominations, attendance is shrinking. Clearly something needs to change. What that change will be is yet to be determined. It might not look like what we think it should look like, but we must trust that God will lead us to what we need to be to continue to spread the Kingdom throughout our world, like yeast mixing in bread dough. When we spread our yeast or seeds, we build relationships. We share the love of Christ. We get to know people. We discern, through God, how we can best serve them. That is how we begin to determine what the future of the body of Christ looks like. For we follow a God that uses what others think is unusable. A God that calls us to love others with reckless abandon. A God that sees in us what others cannot see, whose work often disrupts our nice orderly gardens. A God that calls us to use our God-given talents to their fullest extent, like Solomon. By living this way, we become part of what the Kingdom of Heaven is made, the yeast that makes it rise. May we seek to find those opportunities, those weeds growing around us. Amen.

Call to Serve.

Our God calls us to seek and find the hints of the Kin-dom in our world, and to nurture its growth among us. We will use our gifts, tithes and offerings to rebuild the body of Christ.

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 that seeks to promote the growth of God's seeds of shalom around us.

As we listen to the following hymn, *For the Beauty of the Earth*, performed by Mutual Kumquat, let's give some thought to what we might do in the coming days to better see the unconventional growth of God's kin-dom in the world around us, and even within our community of faith, and how we might encourage that Growth.

A Time for Reflection

Reflection on the Word [video] *For the Beauty of the Earth*,
performed by Mutual Kumquat

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

The Prayer of Thanksgiving

Grow these gifts in your love, Bless our offerings, our hearts and our hopes in your love To make us worthy of your work for your Kin-dom in heaven, And among us here, even now. Fill these gifts and each of us with your goodness. Amen.

Blessing/Assurance

Go forth in Wisdom, in hope, in courage. With hearts open to recognize the signs of the reign of God in our midst, and courage to create more space for grace and growth in our lives and our world.

Sending Forth

As we extinguish this candle, the visual representation of God's spirit at work within and among us, let us carry this inside each one of us this week, letting it guide us to lives focused on seeking the unexpected growth of God's kin-dom and justice in the world around us. Amen.

Postlude - *Blessings*, written by Laura Mixon Story, arranged by Carol Tornquist, played by church musician Annie Center, reported under CCLI Streaming license 20261246

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jJODR4r6atc&t=1s>