

Worship Service ~ *The Veiled Revealing*

12th Sunday after Pentecost, Year B,

11th August, 2024

1 Corinthians 1:18-31 / Mark 4:1-20

Prelude

played by church musician Annie Center,

Opening Music ~ TBD

Welcome / Announcements

We seek to welcome all of God's children to join us in bearing witness to the radically transforming power of God's love. As we gather today, let's share the joy and peace of Christ with each other by greeting each other as we pass the peace.

Pass the Peace

Opening Hymn

For the Beauty of the Earth 89

Call to Worship

One: In Christ are gathered all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, glory, and power. With the saints of all ages we say together:

All: **“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”**

Invocation

Father of all creation, you are Lord of all the teeming life, all the movements of galaxies, and all the mysteries of the world. But you take special delight in this gathering! Not because of our greatness, but because of the greatness of your grace and love.

So as we rejoice in you, and as we worship your Son, and as we are met by your Spirit; help us to know that you rejoice in us. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.

Scripture Reading ~ 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart."

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe.

For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom,

but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth.

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,

so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

A Time of Prayer

Sharing Joys and Concerns

Today we come together as a community to share together our joys and concerns, and lift them to God in prayer.

Pastoral Prayer

Prayer by pastor

Hymn

Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise 70

Sermon Passage ~ Mark 4:1-20

Again he began to teach beside the sea. And a very large crowd gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat in it on the sea, and the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land.

And he was teaching them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them:

“Listen! Behold, a sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it.

Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and immediately it sprang up, since it had no depth of soil.

And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root, it withered away.

Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain.

And other seeds fell into good soil and produced grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

And he said, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables.

And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables,

so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?”

The sower sows the word.

And these are the ones along the path, where the word is sown: when they hear, Satan immediately comes and takes away the word that is sown in them.

And these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy.

And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away.

And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful.

But those that were sown on the good soil are the ones who hear the word and accept it and bear fruit, thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold.”

Message ~ *The Veiled Revealing Mark 4:1-20*

Rev. Jonny Finlayson

We use symbols to communicate deeper meanings. Everything from priceless pieces of art - to road signs. For example, what does a license plate mean? It means “these are the alpha-numerical codes assigned by the state to my vehicle, so it’s legal, and btw it’s not expired” Have you ever been in someone’s garage or basement, and they have their old license plates up on their wall. What does that mean?! “Maybe, it signifies my first car; youthful energy and adventure; a simpler time; the state I grew up in and what I love about the place where I’m rooted.”

We can’t help but to write deep meaning into symbols. In Jesus’s case - he hid the deepest meaning he talked about in everyday, seemingly mundane stories, called parables. And this morning, Mark tells us why. Jesus veils what he reveals, so that the Spirit would reveal what is veiled, so that the church would retell what has been revealed.

Veils What He Reveals

Jesus is preaching again. And as he teaches the crowd grows even bigger. So Jesus gets in a boat. But not to escape, rather to be heard. There’s a bay in the Sea of Galilee, near Capernaum called “the Bay of Parables.” Here a human voice can be transmitted - through the natural amplification of the water - to thousands on the other side of the shore. And to this crowd, as he was sitting on the water, gently bobbing up and down,

Jesus hides some of the deepest truths of God's Kingdom in a story. He said... "I want you all to Listen! To really listen..."

A sower went out to sow. He spread his seed broadly, expansively; all over the place. Some seed fell on the path where the ground was hard and it didn't penetrate. And birds came, and the birds ate it. Nothing grew out of that seed, it failed. Some seed fell on rocky ground without soil depth and it very quickly sprouted. But the heat of the sun came, and burnt the sprouts. Nothing grew out of that seed, it failed. Some seed fell in a place where the soil was deeper but thorns and weeds were also there. The thorns and weeds came up first, and choked the life out of the seed. Nothing grew out of that seed, it failed. But Some seed fell into good soil, that deep and rich and clear of weeds and ready. And this seed grew.

This seed, rooted in good soil, burst through the threshold of the ground into the air; grabbing hold of life itself, stretching upward and outward courageously into the sunlight and defiantly in the face of enemies and triumphantly above the weeds and thorns. Life happened. Life multiplied. And for as disappointing as the failure and death of many individual kernels of seed, these seeds sprouting life yielded a harvest 30, 60, even 90 times greater than it started! In fact the harvest that year was absolutely abundant.

So what's the meaning Jesus hid inside this story? It's not obvious is it? Jesus' gives a clue to the crowd - ending with: "Did you listen? Did you really listen?" "He who has ears to hear, let him hear. But still, we need help to hear.

Revealing What is Veiled

A while back I had the opportunity to see some of Rembrandt's paintings at an art museum. And I like to think I can appreciate art, but I'm not an expert or anything. But even I could see that these paintings were truly remarkable. I was in awe of the images Rembrandt created out of ink on canvas. And his work evoked thoughts and feelings in me. And I remember wondering: "what did these scenes mean? What do they really mean?" Beginning at v10 - Mark cuts away from this scene and ff to some time in the near future where Jesus has a more intimate setting with his closest followers. They ask him: "what do your parables mean?" And that's an important Question for us too.

Parables were the form in which Jesus' taught the Word of God. They're kinda like sermon illustrations today. Jesus painted word/story pictures - not of abstract shapes and forms, but normal scenes of daily life that everyone *thought* they knew. Jesus was

really good at taking what is familiar, and making you look at it from a different perspective. His teaching is straight-forward, but not simplistic at all. It's nuanced and multi-faceted. You need to really listen, and sit with it, and dig into it, and keep digging to get life out of it. It's like a stained glass window - rather dull and lifeless from the outside, but viewed from the inside beautiful and brilliant. You gotta go inside, sit down and stare at it for a while - or you miss what he's really saying. But his parables were also different in some important ways from sermon illustrations.

I use illustrations to clarify what I'm saying. But his parables are not always doing that. They often do the opposite actually. And it's not because Jesus sucks at public speaking - it's actually intentional.

One lesson of the parable of the sower - as Jesus explains - is that *the same parable* will for some bring clarity and faith and growth, but many others won't get it and remain in darkness. In fact, he says in v10-12 "To you - [*his committed followers that don't just show up for the big speaking engagements, but go to dinner with him after*] - the mystery of the Kingdom of God has been given." Why? Because they're with Jesus, asking him the same question most people in the very large crowd asked. Now, Jesus' explanation kinda sounds limiting and exclusionary.

We're told in the Psalms that the clarity and power of the word of God makes it like a sword; that it divides. One of the things it divides - is people; and one of the things it reveals is what kind of soil it has fallen into. The word of God doesn't reveal universally to all people the mysteries of the kingdom. They reveal the mysteries of the Kingdom to those who have been given the grace to hear / but to those who are "on the outside" this seed - the lack of life from it - confirms their barrenness. Surely you've wondered, "Jesus why do so few people believe in you?" Well, there's at least a couple ways to address that.

The first is - what does *mystery* mean?

Jesus is not talking about something that cannot be known until you have special knowledge, gained either from: Ecstatic spiritual experience, or through learning and education, or even through rigid and faithful spiritual disciplines or obeying God's law or anything like that. This may seem like he's establishing an exclusive club that only some people can join and once you're in only then you're told the secrets! But what "mystery" means in the bible - is something that in the past was hidden, but is now being revealed. [*say it again*].

Jesus preached the Kingdom gospel in front of a crowd so large they couldn't hear him without amplification! Jesus spread this seed everywhere! He's revealing the word of God to the world - without exclusion. The point - remember - is not that Jesus won't tell certain people or certain kinds of people, it's that some people don't have ears to hear.

The second way to address the "exclusion" is - what is the mystery of the Kingdom?

The mystery of the Kingdom - that some people hear, accept and grow in - and others can't hear, reject and walk away from - is centered on Christ himself; Christ alone. Again that sounds exclusionary, but this is why we read 1 Corinthians. Jesus is King of this Kingdom. And the exclusiveness of *Jesus* creates the most profoundly inclusive community ever.

"For the Word of the cross - [*we could say 'the seed of the cross'*] - is folly to those who are perishing..." Why is it folly - according to Paul - not because they're not smart enough! It's a problem with their ears, with the connection between their hearts and their ears. And often that means it's the smart people, the educated people, the social elites, the rich, the wealthy and powerful, that don't hear. And this is especially good news to the outcast, the weak, the orphan, the widow.

As Paul explains - using the meaning hidden in the cross - a savior-God being rejected and cursed for the sake of sinners? A God establishing his glory by becoming a curse for those who are unworthy? Self-righteous people are scandalized by it - they don't *need* that kind of savior. Sophisticated, civilized people laugh at it, relativize it, scoff at it. "...but to us who are being saved it is the *power of God.*"

But Jesus also frees us from the kind of insider / outsider paradigms that dominate the world - our political institutions, socio-economic divisions, and our culture's fickle determinations of who gets to have the floor. The community of Jesus is the only one where both rich and poor, minority and majority, men and women, conservative and liberal will sit beside one another in the Kingdom.

In Jesus' presence, we're free from having to be the wise, the understanding, the righteous of the world: But in honest humility we can say: "Jesus, I would have never listened, I'd have never come to you unless you brought me here by your Spirit." And it's in that same humility, that we can even learn to say: "Jesus, I accept that I don't decide who receives the gift of the Kingdom. You do. And I believe that in your great love, you will decide with perfect justice, compassion and wisdom."

So why doesn't everyone see? Does someone specifically come to mind? - who has spent many years in church, grew up in church, at one point in their life claimed to believe but doesn't anymore. Or maybe a friend or neighbor you've told about Christ. Maybe this person is someone you really love.

Why doesn't God give this grace to everyone? I don't know. And neither do you. God doesn't reveal the answers to all the mysteries. But through prayer, through Scripture, through worship and community; he does call us to press into him in the murky waters of unanswered questions. It's very common that Jesus tells you: "Listen I love you, but I can't tell you what you think you want to know" - we'd learn to say "Ok, I trust you."

Retelling What Has Been Revealed

Who is "the sower?" Jesus said the sower is anyone who spreads the word - is the sower. In the beginning, God is the sower. In Genesis 1:1, God speaks of the verbal seed that sprouts galaxies, land, ocean and everything that lives. God forms human beings from the earth - man and woman, each in their own way - and with his own words, and the words he gave Adam and Eve - speaks the fabric of a brand new culture and community into being. God walks in the garden with them in a relationship with him. Imagine the conversations they had - the words he spoke!

Even when the deceiver, with evil, lying words swoops down to steal life away. God kept speaking life, promising salvation; promising that - and to quote Genesis 3:15 - "*the seed of the woman*" would overcome the evil one."

So God sent his Son - the Word made flesh and the promised seed of the woman. As we've seen since Mark 1:14, he came preaching; spreading seed - the gospel of the Kingdom - the precious truth that was lost. He came in fulfillment of the great promises of the OT:

[Listen Isaiah 55 - 600 years before Christ]

As the rain and the 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.

If you look at a seed, it's impossible to see the potential within it. You have to get inside this story, you have to believe that life - is there waiting to burst. An apple seed is so small, lifeless - but - within it is the potential to feed the world.

Jesus says something amazing in John 12 v24, Jesus - foretelling his death and resurrection - says: *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a [seed] falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”* Jesus’s life embodied this hidden truth. Ignored, belittled, seen as insignificant. Rejected and cast aside by humanity, dying a God-forsaken death, buried under ground to be forgotten. But *that* - event fulfilled every promise God ever made, and fed the world with eternal life. It's in the darkness that the unseen work of death turning to life takes place. Christ’s death turned to life in the darkness of the tomb, then bursting out in death-defiant, glorious sunlight with nothing to stop him. That’s when things started to change. That’s really when people started to notice. That’s when the Kingdom sprouted.

Listen, God continues to sow the seed. And here’s how he does it - he uses you, and me, and us. This story is the shape that Jesus’ life took. So it's the shape our lives take. His Word, his story, his life - a little seed in our ear - at first it seemed to die there - but grows us into a fruitful garden. And God intends us to spread and drop fruit everywhere. And as we do - often it looks like nothing is happening, nothing is being accomplished. Where is the good soil, I don’t see it! But in a way, that doesn’t matter.

Let Jesus encourage you here. Don’t lose faith in the power of the seed of the cross; the power of the word of God, the power of Christ’s Kingdom, the power God has built into your own testimony, your life of faith, your love for others. It’s not our job to create life - that’s God’s job. And he will accomplish what he has willed to accomplish. It’s our job to - with every aspect of our life, word and deed - retell what he has revealed. To share this story and live this story.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Father, in the words of Jesus we are directed in these mysteries, that are beyond us, sometimes scare us, and confuse us. Still, with him we “thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children. Make us like that! For such was your gracious will...”

And conform our wills to your gracious will; that you would send us out to the heavily burdened, the suffering and the weak, so that they would find rest in Christ.”

Call to Serve

As you have been fed by Christ; go feed the hungry.

As you have been set free by the gospel; go to set free all kinds of prisoners.

As you have received; give.

As you have heard the word; proclaim it to others.

As God has worked gracious redemption and sanctification in you; testify to it.

As you see God's righteousness and peace around you; point it out.

And in everything, where there is need beyond you, blessing unearned by you, sorrow that threatens you, or joy that overwhelms you; pray.

As we listen to Annie play, reflect on where Christ might be calling you to extend his grace.

A Time for Reflection

Played by church musician Annie Center

Hymn

The Church's One Foundation 311 (**v1,2,4,5)

Benediction

Short prayer by pastor

Postlude

played by church musician Annie Center,

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