

Sixth Sunday of Pentecost, Year A, July 12, 2020 UPMP

PRELUDE

WELCOME / CALL TO WORSHIP: "Christ Be Our Light" (handout)

SCRIPTURE:

**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!

"Hear then the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

HYMN AFTER SCRIPTURE: "More About Jesus Would I Know" #339

SERMON:

"More about Jesus Would I Know"... when a Hymn title is in the vernacular of the Star Wars Jedi master "Yoda"—we know we're in for some wisdom.

And that's what we seek, is it not? More about who He is. More about his mission, His calling, His teaching.

I think my deepest dream would be to be sitting with him, in a smaller room, in table fellowship as he shares with the disciples. And we get those messages. Those were the text a few weeks ago—Matthew 10 and 11.

But here it's different. Jesus isn't in a small room with a small group of people. The text reads: *Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen!"*

I love the image of Jesus on the boat. Not just because I like boats, but also because what I picture is how the sound carries so well across the water. One of my campsites a few weeks back in the Boundary Waters was on what we might call a "flyover lake"—or a "paddle through" lake where plenty of people cross it, but very few stop and make it a destination. So there I am, floating on my pad, still as can be, and as they passed I could hear them talking to one another. Small snippets of where they are in their conversations. Some laughing, some singing, some arguing. These moments they probably thought were private, not realizing how well sound carries over the water.

But this... this is not a "private" moment for Jesus. He's not alone with the disciples, and because of that it is time to switch to a new way of teaching: One commentary put it this way: *There he is out on the water, in front of a crowd that could have included spies from the empire and concerned religious authorities as well as pickpockets and thieves, so Jesus turns to a common practice of the time: speaking in parables.*

Because in parables, you can't be directly implicated. They are open for interpretation. Like the disclaimer at the beginning of a work of fiction. You know, on in small print on the copyright page—"All resemblance to actual people is purely coincidental."

And it's interesting: I went to look up one of these disclaimers, and I grabbed the first work of fiction behind me on my shelf. It was Andre Brink's "A Dry White Season" about Apartheid in South Africa, and here is how that disclaimer read in that book: --And as I read this, imagine Jesus giving this same disclaimer before he shares the parables with the crowds:

*Nothing in this novel has been invented, and the climate, history, and circumstances whom which it arises are those of South Africa today. (This was 1979) But separate events and people have been recast in the context of a novel [or parable, we'll add] in which they exist as fiction only. It is not the surface reality that is important but the patterns and relationships underneath that surface. Therefore all resemblance been the characters and incidents in this book and people and situations outside is strictly coincidental."*

--It is not the surface reality that is important, but the patterns and relationships underneath... THAT'S what the parables are all about.

And this is a great one! It is actually explained! And the thing is, this is a big picture statement about God's grace. It is welcoming and inclusive and respectful of the unique ways the Holy Spirit sows seeds in each of us. And the unique ways each of us respond.

This parable, this story, is not a manual for order and structure in God's world, it is no legalism nor commandment nor judgment—not a guideline for who's right and who's wrong, who is saved and who isn't.

--The story is about the wild and holy and beautiful diversity of each of us, and how God honors that and walks with each of us uniquely.

We are asked bluntly asked: How do you receive the Holy Spirit? What type of soil are you? Does your witness and hearing lead to understanding?"

And here's the thing, friends, none of us are just one type of soil! Imagine this for yourself now:

There are places in each of us where let outside powers and influences devour our seeds.

There are places in each of us where our paths are so worn and trodden that no new seed can grow. Places where our soil is so rocky—usually from the brokenness of our past and our angers and fears—that nothing can take root in any significant way, and when life becomes challenging, it dies right away.

There are places where the cumber of thorns in our lives chokes out Holy Spirit.

BUT... do not despair! We are people of God's hope. We are people of the Good News. God still walks with us. God knows we're going to mess up. God knows we have places right now where seeds cannot grow--

I just had that earlier this week. I'm counseling a couple on a marriage issue, asking them to bring God's presence into their discord, and I'm thinking "it is so easy not to say that to other people, but why could I never do that in my own marital discord?" Back then, the ground was too trodden and the thorns were too thick. Now I know. Will I do better in my next relationship? You bet your sweet heavenly doves I will!

Each unique. Each in our own time. God's path leads us to be much wiser, and much more loving...each in our own time...our own way.

So my advice for you: do what you can now to improve the soil around you. Improve it!

And I have one easy way I'll share with you today.

I shared a bit of this in the weekly reminders:

So: what would a "How Great Thou Art" moment look like to you? How about an "Amazing Grace" moment?

Name them, friends, and claim them. Give them all their proper honor and gratitude. God's love is present and entering your life in a thousand little ways every day. Collect those moments like agates. Celebrate them like flowers in spring. Familiarize yourself with them as you do with your surroundings. Look for them. Seek them out. Put yourself in places and situations where you have felt them before. Turn your life, quite frankly, toward the many ways God's grace is trying to reach you today. Every time you do, you truly are in the presence of God. Imagine if we made a lifestyle out of that!

As we keep at it, friends, it grows, and ultimately has the power to penetrate even the most parched and thorny landscapes in our lives.

We may not be in a quiet room with the disciples, listening to Jesus teach.  
We may not be on the shoreline with the crowds, listening to the parables.

But he is with us every step. Every breath. Every moment.

So engage. It gets better and better, friends.

HYMN AFTER SERMON: "Like a River Glorious" #397

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PASTORAL PRAYER

LORD'S PRAYER

SOLO: "Children of Heavenly Father" (solo by Cathy Dale. Linda Bray, accompanist)

BENEDICTION

"There is a Name I Love to Hear" #304