**MODIFIED SERVICE FOR THE 6TH SUNDAY OF PENTECOST**

**ZION EV. LUTHERAN CHURCH, PHLIPSBURG**

Welcome to everyone on this 6th Sunday of Pentecost, where we all still gathered safely from the comfort of our homes. I am back from my holidays, and yes we do have a new septic system. How is everyone dealing with the weather? We certainly cannot complain about the lack of sun and heat this year! I think all of us have gotten some much needed rain over the past couple days, it was a welcome sight to see!

A few announcements about todays service, I will welcome you to share the peace during the service, this element has been missed by our members, and today we will celebrate communion together. I ask that you set and prepare your table, perhaps with a tablecloth and a candle, and some juice or wine and bread or crackers. Even though we are physically separated God is with us in the bread and wine that we share. If you do not feel comfortable having communion it is perfectly acceptable to wait until we are again gathered together. There was also a late addition after the service was recorded of the Doxology, thanks Jane and Brenda!

Just a reminder that if there is anyone you would like to include on our prayer list, please call or email me, or send an email through the website. Our GotoMeeting Coffee hour resumes today at 11:00, please join us! Church Council meets this coming week, look for an update on the happenings at Zion in the August Messenger.

Please remember that Zion relies on your continued support each week to meet our monthly expenses. Thank you to all who support and pray for our congregation.

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God, whose steadfast love is everlasting, whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation. **Amen**

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance, and we deny your presence in our lives. We place our hope in ourselves and rely on our own efforts. We fail to believe that you provide enough for all. We abuse your good creation for our own benefit. We fear difference and do not welcome others as you have welcomed us. We sin in thought, word, and deed. By your grace forgive us: through your love, renew us: and in your Spirit, lead us: so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen**

Beloved God, by the radical abundance of divine mercy, we have peace with God through Christ Jesus, through whom we have obtained grace upon grace. Our sins are forgiven. Let us live now in hope. For hope does not disappoint, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

**Amen.**

**OPENING HYMN- Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty- ELW 533**

**FIRST READING:****Isaiah 55:10-13**

A reading from Isaiah.

10For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, 11so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. 12For you shall go out in joy and be led back in peace;  
the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. 13Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the Lord for a memorial, or an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

The word of the Lord.

**PSALM: Psalm 65:[1-8] 9-13**

1You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; to you shall vows be fulfilled.  
2To you, the one who answers prayer, to you all flesh shall come.  
3Our sins are stronger than we are, but you blot out our transgressions.  
4Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there!  
They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your temple.   
5Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation,  
O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans far away.  
6You make firm the mountains by your power; you are girded about with might.  
7You still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the clamor | of the peoples.  
8Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.   
9You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water. You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth.  
 10You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.  
 11You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty.  
 12May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, and the hills be clothed with joy.  
 13May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; let them shout for joy and sing.

**GOSPEL: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

The holy gospel according to Matthew.

1That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 2Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. 3And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 5Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. 6But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. 7Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. 8Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. 9Let anyone with ears listen!”  
 18“Hear then the parable of the sower. 19When 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. 20As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21yet 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. 22As 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. 23But 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.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

The parable that we read in today’s gospel is one of my favourite parables. Perhaps it is because I am a gardener and wannabe farmer at heart. I love to plant seeds, watch them grow, and then reap the bountiful harvest that comes in the fall. I took the last couple of years off from planting a big garden. The busyness of my internship and schoolwork kept me occupied and I ended up growing way more weeds than vegetable plants. The soil in our garden was also tired and depleted; nothing was really growing all that well…well, except for the weeds. So, we let it rest for a year or so and added some manure this spring and began planting in late May. I try to get out for a little bit each day to weed and hill the plants, and so far we are being rewarded with wonderful growth. I know that many of you enjoy gardening and working away in your flowerbeds. If the pandemic has given us anything positive, it is the extra time to spend nurturing and enjoying nature and God’s lifegiving creation! So many of us can relate to this parable because of our love of gardening or farming, but as I studied and reflected on the parable this week, I began to wonder if Jesus was really talking about the literal process of sowing the seeds and reaping the harvest or is he trying to teach the disciples and us something else besides gardening in general?

The first century was not easy for Jesus’ followers. There was much poverty, persecution, and oppression much like what is happening now in modern-day Palestine. The followers faced rejection from both the religious leaders of the times and even their families. You have heard me speak a couple of times in the past few months that many families were divided over faith and belief in the radical grace of Jesus Christ. Jesus was aware of the difficulties he faced, he knew the cost of his beliefs and he knew that life was and would be difficult for the disciples and the crowds who chose to follow him. So, let us look at this parable of sowing and harvesting from the viewpoint of discipleship, the cost of discipleship, and the realities of discipleship in our lives today.

We begin with the sower of the seeds. Just who is the sower? Jesus is the sower; he goes out and sows the seed or the Word of God with reckless and wild abandon all over the place, (not in picture-perfect rows made by GPS coordinates prepared while sitting in your air-conditioned tractor or lines of string attached to sticks in the ground in our home gardens). Jesus is fully aware that not all the seeds will land safely in the right type of soil, that not all of them will grow, but he is generous and loving.

The soil represents the crowds who followed Jesus and us. And as we all know there are diverse types of folks in the world, all having different views, circumstances, and opinions, just like the diverse soils that Jesus spoke of. Jesus threw the seeds on hardened paths, where few will grow because they become food for birds and wildlife. Some land on rocky ground, where the seeds find a space to root but the roots cannot grow deep enough and they soon dry out and shrivel up when a long period of moistureless days appear…think of the past few weeks in our area! Some of the seeds land among the thorns and are quickly choked of any available space because of the fast-growing thorn bushes. But some fall directly onto perfect fertile soil that has been lovingly prepared by overturning the soil, adding manure, and giving it the right amount of rain.

Can we imagine who these types of people are in our modern society? The hardened paths may represent those who have been trampled on in society, people of colour, the LGBTQ community, the homeless, the poor, the addicted. The rocky ground could be folks who say they believe and trust in God but give up and give in when times get hard, they lose faith. The thorns represent some folks who worry more about wealth and keeping up with the Joneses than being true disciples of Christ, than walking with one another and being the voice of those who have no voice in the world. Greed can block out the word of God and the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ.

Of course, the last soil, the fertile and well-prepared soil is where we all want to be as followers of Jesus Christ. We want to accept the word and live out the works of Jesus Christ in the world. And in doing so, we grow in spirit and in trust, spreading the good news of the gospel and loving one another as we have all been unconditionally loved by God.

But truth be told, we are not always the good soil, we are imperfect human beings who get angry, we doubt, we worry, and we think we can do it on our own without help from others. Sometimes we are that rocky ground, that hard path, that thorn bush choking out everything else that is living around it, but that is the point of the parable. God doesn’t care, well it’s not that God doesn’t care, it’s that God knows we are imperfect, God knows that we are human and that is why Jesus throws the seeds everywhere; in the broken, barren, rocky and weedy spots in our lives. Through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ, every day we are given new life, and we can be steadfast in the knowledge that God brings the promise of hope and trust in the world. There is always love and there is always understanding in knowing that God does not give up on us! Ever!! The seeds will always be thrown exactly where they need to be!

God is generous and loving, and God meets us exactly where we are at, in the brokenness, in the addiction, in the worry, in the doubt and in the pain of our lives, providing us bushels of abundant love and mercy, and the gifts of hope, grace, and compassion in a tired and weary world. And for that I say, thanks be to God! Amen

**HYMN OF THE DAY- We Plow the Fields and Scatter- ELW 681**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ha628Pj_Rns>

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world. *A brief silence.*

Gracious God, your word is sown throughout the world, on hardened paths and rocky and weed infested areas. Enliven your church to acknowledge your word in the brokenness of our world, knowing that all are loved. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Bring moisture to areas where rain is needed so crops may grow in bounty. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Reigning God, we pray for world, country, and community leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. Help us to remember all who have been trampled like seeds thrown onto hardened paths in society. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Abiding God, care for all who are sick and injured, especially Eddie, Elaine, Ruth, Mary Ann, Susie, David, Donelda, and Lynette and those we name in the silence of our hearts. For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope and trust. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Renewing God, this pandemic has given the church new and different life as we continue to gather at home out of love for our neighbours. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted, that we might continue to grow as your disciples. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain our ministries such as Project Red and deepen our relationships with the wider community. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.**Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

*Please share a sign of peace with your loved ones whether in person, on the phone, or online. You can even post on Zion’s Facebook page!*

**DOXOLOGY*Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow* (ELW 884)**

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;  
praise him, all creatures here below;  
praise him above, ye heav'nly host;  
praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

**MEAL**

The Lord be with you.

**And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

**THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Holy God, mighty Lord, gracious Father: Endless is your mercy and eternal your reign. You have filled all creation with light and life; heaven and earth are full of your glory. We praise you for the grace shown to your people in every age: the promise to Israel, the rescue from Egypt, the gift of the promised land, the words of the prophets; and, at this end of all the ages, the gift of your Son, who proclaimed the good news in word and deed and was obedient to your will, even to giving his life.

In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;

broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it for all to drink, saying:

This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. Do this for the remembrance of me.

For as often as we eat of this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.**

Therefore, O God, with this bread and cup, we remember the life our Lord offered for us. And, believing the witness of his resurrection, we await his coming in power

to share with us the great and promised feast. **Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.**

Send now, we pray, your Holy Spirit, that we who share in Christ’s body and blood

may live to the praise of your glory and receive our inheritance with all your saints in light. **Amen. Come, Holy Spirit.**

Join our prayers with those of your servants of every time and every place,

and unite them with the ceaseless petitions of our great high priest

until he comes as victorious Lord of all. Through him, with him, in him,

in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, almighty Father,

now and forever. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,**

**hallowed be thy name,**

**thy kingdom come,**

**thy will be done,**

**on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;**

**and forgive us our trespasses,**

**as we forgive those** **who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever.**

**Amen.**

**COMMUNION**

Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Please commune together saying,

**The body of Christ given for you.**

**The blood of Christ shed for you.**

**Amen**

**PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

God of the welcome table, in this meal we have feasted on your goodness and have been united by your presence among us. Empower us to go forth, sustained by these gifts and your love, so that we may share your neighbourly love with all, through Jesus Christ, the giver of abundant life. **Amen.**

**BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace.

**Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING HYMN- Sent Forth By God’s Blessing- ELW 547**

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