**3rd sunday of pentecost- june 13, 2021**

**zion, philipsburg, st. peters, linwood**

Welcome to worship on this 3rd  Sunday of Pentecost, June 13, 2021.

Summer is here, along with the heat and humidity, and spotty rain showers and thunderstorms! It is good to feel the warmth of the sun on our faces.

Our sermon today is one from the Summer Sermon Series provided to the ELCIC by the Bishops and Assistant Bishops of the ELCIC. This morning you will hear the words of Saskatchewan Synod Bishop Syd Hagen.

Council will meet this week and on the agenda is a return to worship. We will keep you informed of all decisions.

We ask that you remember in your prayers the family of Brad Foell who had a St. Peter’s, Linwood connection. Brad passed away peacefully on Wednesday. A graveside service was held on Saturday afternoon at Glen Allan cemetery. Rest eternal grant him, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon him.

We will remember in our prayers today the Afzaal and Salman family of London, who were senselessly murdered in an act of terror last Sunday evening while out for a walk. 9-year-old Fayez remains in the hospital with serious but not life-threatening injuries. Racism and hate have no place in our communities.

Coffee hour will take place today at 11:00. Have you considered joining us? All are welcome! Please remember that Zion relies on your contributions in these continuing times of pandemic. If you have not made a donation lately, please consider doing so. Thank you to all who continue to support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**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.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

O God, you are the tree of life, offering shelter to all the world. Graft us into yourself and nurture our growth, that we may bear your truth and love to those in need, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*We Walk by Faith* (ELW 635)**

1 We walk by faith and not by sight;  
with gracious words draw near,  
O Christ, who spoke as none e'er spoke:  
"My peace be with you here."  
  
2 We may not touch your hands and side,  
nor follow where you trod;

but in your promise we rejoice,  
and cry, "My Lord and God!"  
  
3 Help then, O Lord, our unbelief;  
and may our faith abound  
to call on you when you are near  
and seek where you are found:  
  
4 For you, O resurrected Lord,  
are found in means divine:  
beneath the water and the word,  
beneath the bread and wine.  
  
5 And when our life of faith is done,  
in realms of clearer light  
we may behold you as you are,  
with full and endless sight.

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Ezekiel 17:22-24**

A reading from Ezekiel.

22Thus says the Lord God: I myself will take a sprig from the lofty top of a cedar; I will set it out.  
 I will break off a tender one from the topmost of its young twigs; I myself will plant it on a high and lofty mountain.  
 23On the mountain height of Israel I will plant it, in order that it may produce boughs and bear fruit, and become a noble cedar.  
 Under it every kind of bird will live; in the shade of its branches will nest winged creatures of every kind.  
 24All the trees of the field shall know that I am the Lord. I bring low the high tree, I make high the low tree; I dry up the green tree and make the dry tree flourish. I the Lord have spoken; I will accomplish it.

The word of the Lord.

**PSALM: Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15**

1It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praise to your name, O Most High;  
 2**to herald your love in the morning** **and your faithfulness at night;**  
 3on the psaltery, and on the lyre, and to the melody of the harp.  
 4**For you have made me glad by your acts, O Lord;**  
  **and I shout for joy because of the works of your hands.**  
 12The righteous shall flourish like a palm tree,  
  and shall spread abroad like a cedar of Lebanon.  
 13**Those who are planted in the house of the Lord** **shall flourish in the courts of our God;**  
 14they shall still bear fruit in old age; they shall be green and succulent;  
 15**that they may show how upright the Lord is,** **my rock, in whom there is no injustice.**

**SECOND READING: 2 Corinthians 5:6-10, 14-17**

A reading from 2 Corinthians.

6So we are always confident; even though we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord—7for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8Yes, we do have confidence, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. 9So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. 10For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil.  
14For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. 15And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.  
  16From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way. 17So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!

The word of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: Mark 4:26-34**

The holy gospel according to Mark.

Jesus also said, ‘This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the land. Night and day, while he sleeps, when he is awake, the seed is sprouting and growing; how, he does not know. Of its own accord the land produces first the shoot, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear. And when the crop is ready, at once he starts to reap because the harvest has come.’ He also said, ‘What can we say that the kingdom is like? What parable can we find for it? It is like a mustard seed which, at the time of its sowing, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth. Yet once it is sown it grows into the biggest shrub of them all and puts out big branches so that the birds of the air can shelter in its shade.’ Using many parables like these, he spoke the word to them, so far as they were capable of understanding it. He would not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything to his disciples when they were by themselves. The Gospel of the Lord.26

**SERMON – Saskatchewan Bishop Syd Hagen**

It is good to be with you today as you gather as communities of faith, either from your homes virtually, or gathered in-person following Health Directives. This morning, I would like to walk through the text with you. No question, the pandemic has denied us many things, but it also provides unexpected opportunities. So, this morning, rather than finding a pulpit to record what looks somewhat like a sermon in normal days, I’d like to take this opportunity to sit at a desk and walk with you through a brief Bible study. If you have a Bible nearby, I’d invite you to turn with me to the Gospel according to Mark.

We will center on one of the parables in our Gospel for the day and listen together for God’s Word for as we approach hopefully the last leg of our pandemic marathon, and as we experience the many other events happening in our lives and the lives of our community.

Let us pray. May these words of my mouth and the meditations and imaginations of our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Strength, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

As we open the Gospel according to Mark, keep in mind the Gospels, the synoptic gospels in particular, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, come to us in a broad three-part narrative. Part One is the Prologue. The Prologue begins each gospel with a few chapters that gives a hint of what the narrative will be about. Then, Part Two is a large section that narrates Jesus one-year ministry in the northern area of Palestine: Galilee. Finally, Part Three narrates Jesus’ week in Jerusalem, culminating in Good Friday and Easter Sunday.

This morning I will walk us briefly through the Prologue in chapter 1, toward our text that takes place early in the Galilean ministry.

As you turn to the beginning of Mark, you will find that the Prologue is very short—13 verses long. If you expect to find stories of angels singing to shepherds, or wisemen following a star, you will not find them. Mark’s gospel only gives us this. Jesus comes out of Nazareth in Galilee, he comes out of the north country far from the center of government, far from the center of faith at the temple. Jesus meets John the Baptist and is baptized. As the water runs down him, he hears the voice, “You are my Beloved son, I’m delighted with you” and the Spirit comes upon him—which of course means, he is empowered to begin his mission.

As you read on, perhaps surprisingly, following baptism, the Spirit does not send Jesus into ministry but immediately “drives” Jesus into the wilderness where he is tempted by the Satan. Again, if you expected a long dialogue between Jesus and the Satan, in Mark you don’t get it. As so often in Mark, the narrative is raw and unexplained. The narrative simply says this: that he was with the Satan and wild beasts for 40 days, and afterward the angels ministered to him.

As you turn past the prologue to Jesus’ ministry in Galilee, Part Two starts with an important summary statement at 1.14. After Jesus comes out of the wilderness, he brings this message. “The Kingdom of God has come near.” Turnaround and believe the Gospel. Of course, Jesus was not the only one announcing that the Kingdom of God, a new age, was breaking in. During this time in Israel of Roman occupation, with Roman soldiers everywhere, and Roman ways of living intruding everywhere—many saw the world at a point of crisis and looked for God to break in to bring in a New Age, the Kingdom of God. The Zealots called for a military insurrection to drive out the Romans and bring in the Kingdom of God, the New Age for Israel. They looked for a figure like King David, a Messianic general to be God’s instrument. The Pharisees called for devotion to the Torah which would bring on the coming of

Messiah to bring in a New age. The Sadducees called for establishing the Temple and the proper line of priests to bring in the New Age of God’s Kingdom. The Essenes called for leaving the evil world to set themselves apart and wait for two Messiahs--one military, one priestly—to come and bring in a New Age of faithfulness, the Kingdom of God.

Jesus simply states that this New Age, the Kingdom of God is near. Then he calls people to turn around and believe the Gospel. But there is no further explanation at this point of what this Kingdom of God that Jesus is declaring is all about. Of course, we will see it unfold, in quite unexpected ways, as the narrative goes on.

In the Galilean section what Jesus does first is to bring together a community. Still in chapter 1, verse 16, he walks by the lake and sees two fishermen working. He says, “Follow me and I’ll have you gathering in people.” The two fishermen leave their nets on the shore and follow Jesus. In the same chapter, two other fishermen do the same. Why do they follow Jesus? Again, Mark’s narrative leaves that raw and unexplained. Simply, Jesus arrives, and they find themselves following him.

Later, the tax collector Levi, hears the call to follow Jesus. By our text, in chapter 4, there are now 12 disciples following Jesus. Others no doubt are part of the Jesus’ community, but these are the 12 that go with him on the ministry journey.

They must have wondered, don’t you think, these fisherman, these ordinary folk, what this Kingdom of God, this New Age would look like. Was Jesus calling them to a military uprising like the Zealots? Or was he preparing them to live in a religious cloister like the Essenes? Or something else entirely?

So, in Galilee the small band of apprentices, this community of Jesus followed Jesus—watching and listening. As you skim through the first three chapters, they watch him heal people—people broken in body, or in mind, or in soul. It doesn’t seem to matter what sort of people they were. The coming of the Kingdom would be about bringing healing. The language of healing in their worldview was the language of casting out unclean spirits rather than our world’s language of disease and bacteria and virus. But the ministry, in whatever language, was of healing of those broken in some way.

They also would listen to him teaching. In Mark, especially, Jesus does not ‘teach’ in long sermons. Instead, he teaches them in short parables. Again, these are usually raw and unexplained.

Our text today in chapter 4 beginning at verse 30 is one of these. Jesus begins, “**With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?”** The little church of Jesus must have leaned forward at the words: the Kingdom of God. So, this is what the new age will look like? This is what we are getting into. They leaned forward. . .so do we.

The text continues: “**It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth**.”

Mustard seeds in that time and place were proverbially small. Remember Jesus statement in one of the Gospels to disciples, “If you had faith the size of a mustard seed you could move mountains.”

The Kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, a tiny little nothing. Mustard was used then and now for seasoning. Sometimes it was planted. But, apparently, often mustard wasn’t cultivated. It spread like a dandelion, and you often got it even if you weren’t looking for it. It was perhaps, not the most elegant of seeds.

Our text continues. . .”**yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs.”** What an odd image: One might have expected something akin to the saying: “mighty oaks from little acorns grow!” From small beginnings come glorious, elegant oak trees. But that is not our parable.

Black mustard itself is an herb, not a tree. It might grow to about 6 feet high. Then stem of the plant grew to maybe an inch thick. But listen, the mustard see grows, Jesus says, into the greatest of all herbs. It becomes more like a ‘shrubbery.’ I know, if you, like me, have a Monty Python memory, you might remember what the Knights of Ni demand when King Arthur’s knights desire to have safe passage: “We want a shrubbery!” Sorry, back to our text.

Listen. The shrubbery “**puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”** So, this inelegant seed, tiny, common seed, that grows unexpectedly into a shrub, gathers the birds of the air and they make their nests in its shade.

What a fascinating image. What does it mean? Of course, in Mark, Jesus does not explain what the parable means. It is left for us hearers to listen and to consider the parable together. So, let’s do that. Let’s listen together to this odd little parable. I wonder what it sounded like to the early disciples who were wondering about what this “Kingdom of God” Jesus was announcing might look like. Who were wondering what they might be called to do and to be.

The Kingdom of God, this New Age that Jesus is proclaiming, Jesus says, looks like a mustard seed—a tiny, inelegant mustard seed. I think that the little church of Jesus must have nodded. They were mustard seed people. Who were the first disciples? The rich and famous? Hardly. The faith community began with four fishermen. Then a tax collector who was reviled by his own people for ‘selling out’ to the Roman overlords. Later an ex-revolutionary, Simon the Zealot. Mustard seeds, each one.

But not only the first disciples nodded. The Apostle Paul would write this to the early church in Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians1:“Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many of you 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, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are” This New Age would come from Jesus’ mustard seed people.

What about the shrubbery? The little mustard seed that grew into the greatest of herbs, even a shrub. That also doesn’t sound very elegant, either. But you know, as the days passed for this little church of Jesus, they might nod their head at that too. If you turn to chapter 4 in Mark, just after our text, you will find the story of the storm at sea. What do the courageous disciples of Jesus say when the storm hits the community unexpectedly? “Don’t you care that we are perishing here.” Interestingly, in Matthew’s version of that story Jesus calls his disciples “You of little faith”—the Greek work *mikropistos,* you of Micro-faith.” But in the Gospel narrative the little church of Jesus saved their most embarrassing moments for later. Turn to Mark chapter 9 verse 30. Here, Jesus confides in the disciples the hard work that he is now on the way to Jerusalem where he will suffer and die. In the midst of this word so full of sadness from their beloved rabbi the disciples do what? Look at verse 33. They had an argument on the road about which one of the disciples was the most important.

Of course, as you know, the inelegance, the feet of clay of the church, didn’t stop then. When I was teaching a class on the history of Christianity at the University of Regina some years ago, I always wanted to apologize to the students for the way Christians have literally gone to war against each other both sides claiming God was on their side. Each of you likely knows stories of a church in all its human frailty in your own experience. Family members disowned because Lutherans turned Catholic, or because Catholic turned Lutheran. Burials denied because of unpaid benevolence. You know the stories. They are hard stories.

But here is the thing. Jesus says, “The Kingdom of God is breaking into the world through his shrub, this little church of 12 disciples, this little, human, inelegant church. The shrubbery, “puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” Again. The shrubbery, “puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.” William Willimon, long-time chaplain at Duke and author writes this. *In the eyes of the world, the church looks rather pitiful and paltry. Our discipleship, though perhaps earnest, is not that impressive in the eyes of the world. And yet, for all our flaws, the church is the body of Christ, the form the risen Christ has chosen to take in the world.”*

Let me tell you a little story about that. It happened, more years ago than I want to admit, when I was a young pastor serving in a rural community. The phone rang one day. It was the local undertaker. I knew him fairly well. He was a Mennonite. We had talked about our churches a number of times. I remember one long conversation about baptism, and what it meant for Mennonites, what it meant for Lutherans. But this day, he called to say this. “Bill Johnson [let’s use that name for the story] died on the weekend. You may have met him.” I did know him by reputation. He was known as the ‘town drunk,’, that is to say, he was someone suffering from alcoholism more publicly than those who suffered from that disease privately. He continued, “Bill’s family, you may have known, disowned him decades ago. Every one of them. So, there is no one willing to handle his funeral. Now, we thought that, as a funeral home, we would donate the basic funeral for Bill. He was a human being. Would your community be willing to handle the church side of that?” So we did. He was a human being. We were followers of Jesus. So we did. I don’t know if it mattered to anyone in the town that day. I don’t think it made the newspaper. I don’t know if it mattered to his family. But I do know it mattered to our faith community. It mattered to me. Our little shrub had reached out far beyond itself, to give shade to one of the hurting birds of God’s world.

No, we are not perfect, not our people, not our churches. But how many have been gathered in by the community of Jesus in distress. Needing food. Needing a listening ear. Needing a place to belong. Needing love. Needing a gracious Word from God. And the little shrub that is the church of Jesus reaches out. Again and again and again.

**“With what shall we compare the Kingdom of God” says Jesus. It’s like a mustard seed that grows into a shrub. And the birds of the air find shade in its branches.”**

I leave you with this odd, beautiful story, to continue to turn over in your mind and heart as followers of Jesus have for 2000 years. I wonder what God is saying to you in this little parable. And I would leave you with this challenge. Though our faith communities may, in the eyes of the world, look insignificant, a mustard seed; though we may look—sometimes even to ourselves—like a gawky shrub; reach out those arms of Jesus into the world in whatever way that is your gift, in whatever way that is your calling; so that the birds of God’s world can find shade in your branches. For the Kingdom of God is breaking into our world. Turn around and believe the gospel. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY*For the Fruit of All Creation (AR HYD Y NOS)* (ELW 679)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lBXHDbesb7k>

1 For the fruit of all creation,  
thanks be to God.  
For these gifts to ev'ry nation,  
thanks be to God.  
For the plowing, sowing, reaping,  
silent growth while we are sleeping,  
future needs in earth's safekeeping,  
thanks be to God.  
  
2 In the just reward of labor,  
God's will is done.  
In the help we give our neighbor,  
God's will is done.  
In our worldwide task of caring  
for the hungry and despairing,  
in the harvests we are sharing,  
God's will is done.  
  
3 For the harvests of the Spirit,  
thanks be to God.  
For the good we all inherit,  
thanks be to God.  
For the wonders that astound us,  
for the truths that still confound us,  
most of all, that love has found us,  
thanks be to God.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Let us come before the triune God in prayer. *A brief silence.*

Holy God, you plant the seeds of faith in every nation. Enliven your church, so that the good news of your grace may root and grow throughout the world. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Creator, even the trees, shrubs, and flowers delight in your goodness. From the depths of the soil to the highest mountain, bring forth new plants. Restore growth to places suffering drought. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Judge of nations, we pray for our leaders and those in power. Grant them the ability to regard those under their charge with humility, dedicating their lives in service to others. Bring an end to hate, racism, violence, and Islamophobia. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Divine comforter, you show compassion to those in need and provide relief to those who call on you. Bless all who suffer from illness or injury of body, mind, or spirit, and remember especially people trapped in cycles of poverty and homelessness. We remember on this day Eddy, Elaine, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Mary Ann, Bonnie, Mary, Tilly, Robert, Helen, Vivian, Katie, Esther, Rhonda, the families of the 215 Indigenous children buried at the Kamloops Residential School, the Afzaal and Salman families, the family of Brad Foell, and those we name in the silence of our hearts. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Sovereign God, this house of worship belongs to you. We give thanks and pray for our church musicians *especially* Trevor and Jane, Michaelah and Wayne.

We look forward to the joyful noise of children’s laughter and cries, the melody of voices and the songs of our hearts when we return to worship in our spaces. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Eternal God, we give thanks for our ancestors in the faith who are now at home with you, especially Brad. We look forward to that day when we are reunited in your new creation. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We lift our prayers to you, O God, trusting in your abiding grace. **Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

Holy God, our Maker, our Healer, our Teacher,

your magnificent creation springs forth from your Word.

All that has life and breath praises your name.

For your Word that sustains the earth, we thank you, O God.

You sent us Jesus, your Word, to renew the world.

He healed the sick, fed the hungry,

preached your mercy, and called us to faith.

For your Word in our Lord Christ, we praise you, O God.

Nourish us with the Spirit of your Word,

that we may grow in grace, bearing the fruits of redemption,

and sharing your strength and beauty with all the world.

For your Word in our lives, we entreat you, O God.

Accept our thanksgiving and receive our prayer,

for the sake of your living Word, Jesus our Savior. **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.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The God of steadfastness and encouragement

grant you to live in harmony with one another,

in accordance with Christ Jesus. **Amen.**

The God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing,

so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

The God of all grace ☩ bless you now and forever. **Amen.**

**SENDING SONG*Sent Forth by God's Blessing* (ELW 547)**

1 Sent forth by God's blessing,  
our true faith confessing,  
the people of God from this dwelling take leave.  
The supper is ended. Oh, now be extended the fruits of this service in all who believe.  
The seed of Christ's teaching,  
receptive souls reaching,  
shall blossom in action for God and for all.  
Your grace shall incite us, your love shall unite us to work for your kingdom and answer your call.  
2 With praise and thanksgiving  
to God ever-living,  
the tasks of our ev'ryday life we will face-- our faith ever sharing, in love ever caring, embracing God's children, the whole human race.  
With your feast you feed us,  
with your light now lead us;  
unite us as one in this life that we share.  
Then may all the living  
with praise and thanksgiving  
give honor to Christ and his name that we bear.

**DISMISSAL**

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

**Thanks be to God.**

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