

Sunday, July 12, 2020

From Pastor Stephen, Zion Lutheran Church, Pembroke, ON

Welcome: Luther called the Word of God a “Living Word” that speaks to our hearts, enriching and inspiring us. When God speaks, it is not with empty words; but rather with words that satisfy our hunger for truth and bring healing to our hearts and minds.

We sing our **Gathering Song:** ELW 533 Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty

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.**

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 Saviour and Lord. **Amen.**

First Reading: Isaiah 55: 10 - 13

A reading from Isaiah.

For 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, so 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.

For 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. Instead 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, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Hymn: ELW 726 Light Dawns on a Weary World

Second Reading: Romans 8: 1, 11

A reading from Romans.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Word of God, word of life. **Thanks be to God.**

Song to Welcome the Gospel: ELW 598 For by Grace

Gospel: Matthew 13: 1 – 9, 18 - 23

The holy gospel according to Matthew. **Glory to you, O Lord.**

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 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.”

The gospel of the Lord. **Praise to you, O Christ.**

Homily: Someone I know very well always planted their garden with a yardstick and a ruler, measuring the distance between each row and every seed in each row – and I do mean every seed. It was an operation that required some specialized tools, like tweezers for the planting of carrots.

It was a painstaking process, to say the least, but the end result was very neat, orderly, and rather impressive. If a seed did not germinate, it was quickly replaced so that no open spaces existed. Seeds did not end up in rocky places, or on paths, or among weeds as they did in today’s Gospel.

As a child, I thought everyone planted their garden the same way we did, until a neighbour down the street grew an English flower garden in her front yard. After the soil was given a small and perfunctory amount of tilling, she simply opened a large can of mixed flower seed and threw it around, everywhere.

It was the most fascinating, wanton, madcap thing I had ever seen. The result was a wild but colourful display ...a truly splendid mix that looked marvelous in all its unplanned chaos.

However, I still felt that gardens needed orderliness. So, when I started growing a garden all by myself, I discovered seed tape – an ingenious but expensive little invention that allowed you to plant without a ruler. I thought it was the best invention since sliced bread. In no time, my garden was perfectly planted.

The next day, I went out to the garden to find bits of seed tape strewn all over the place. Chipmunks and squirrels had been very busy digging up everything and then spreading it all over the garden. That year, I had beets growing with the carrots and lettuce growing among the turnips, with not a straight row in sight, with bunches of vegetation and huge gaps of nothingness. Interestingly, the garden produced a lot of vegetables and was quite prolific, despite its very untidy and chaotic appearance, and being the exact opposite of what I had planned.

The Church is like that. Sometimes we wish that it would be neat and tidy just like we plan, and that everything should be in good order and run smoothly the way we want it to function. But our Lord does not use a ruler when planting. He throws the seed of his gospel everywhere, graciously hoping that it will grow everywhere, in everyone, for at least some of the time. Some plants get a little Miracle Grow to give them a boost, others do not.

Often the garden that is the church looks a little spotty and unkept and often the Gospel struggles to take root where hearts are not willing to receive it and nurture it. Also, the world sometimes does not give it much of a chance to grow. But our Lord, the Good Gardener, is a hopeful and optimistic gardener, even in times of

drought and in harsh climates, when minds are closed and harsh and hearts are hard and cold.

Perhaps it is because our Lord had today's reading from the prophet Isaiah in mind. He trusts that his words shall not return to him empty, and that everything he sows will have some benefit, even if it seems hidden to the eye.

As Christ's beloved ones, we are to be generous in sharing and living the Gospel of Christ, even when we think our words and actions will be unheard, not noticed, or ignored. They will return to God, and our heavenly Father will know that they were lived and shared by the faithful ones. Nothing will be unseen or unnoticed by God.

This knowledge will help us when our work as the Church seems difficult or trying, or if it feels that we are not succeeding in the work God called us to do. Not everything we do in the name of Christ will succeed, but none of it will be a failure either, if it is done to honour and bless God, done graciously and generously in the name of Christ.

Jesus grows a lot of crop that is thirtyfold, much to the chagrin of those who may lead a more productive life as Christians or feel they are carrying the load of the church's work. For some, that is all the growth that is possible because of environment, temperament, their past, or the culture that affects them...and to be completely honest, a bit of laziness sometimes. These late bloomers, and those who only bloom seasonally, are still cherished by God, and very much a part of God's garden.

It is good to remember that it is God's Garden and that we are simply God's helpers, servants, friends and assistants. It would appear that God is quite content with a Garden that is beautiful, but also a bit untidy and chaotic.

The Church will be God's messy garden, because God knows not everyone grows well in neat, tidy rows. Jesus also uses unregistered seed...and so the result is a lot of diversity, which we now know is a good thing indeed. He is also slow to label weeds, as he knows that weeds are often plants that no one likes the look of or have not found a use for yet.

Like the English Flower Gardener, Jesus does not always follow the rules we impose, sowing the grace of the Gospel with an abandon that some Christians might even feel is reckless, wild and wanton, flouting our most cherished views and traditions. The result of the church Jesus grows is messy; but in the end it looks very much like the Kingdom of God, and a lot more like paradise than anything else we grow on earth. **Amen**

Hymn: ELW 512 Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil

Prayers of the Faithful: Creator God, you gave us Eden and you lead us into paradise, the garden of your delight and our place of peace and holy rest. We thank you for the beauty that surrounds us that you share with us with generosity and love. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of splendor and majesty, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in promise. Join our songs with theirs in endless praise, and help us always rejoice in your goodness. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our nation's leaders, making difficult decisions. Give us maturity and wisdom to live in these trying and unusual times and help us care for the most vulnerable among us. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Compassionate God, we pray for all who mourn, especially the family and friends of Gloria Biggs and William Sukow. We thank

you for Gloria's life and we commend her to your care in paradise. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We thank you, God of Wisdom, for sowing your Holy Word and planting it in our hearts and minds, and for our Lord, who is your Living Word for us. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of gentleness, we pray for all who struggle with mental illness, made more difficult by this time of isolation and anxiety. Help us care for those who are struggling, grant us patient and understanding hearts and minds. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of healing, we pray for the ill, for David, recovering from surgery, and for all fearful of illness. Grant us your healing presence and watch over those who care for the sick. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Watch over our loved ones who cannot be with us in these days of physical distancing. We long for the times when we can be together again. Until then, bind our hearts together in the love of Christ and the Spirits' presence which is everywhere, in everyone. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, grant us, gracious God.

Gathering all our prayers into one, we pray the prayer that you have 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.**

Blessing: May our Gracious God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, bless us and keep us in the Risen Life of Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Sending Song: ELW 550 On What Has Now Been Sown

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**