

July 12, 2020 – 10:00 am



Jesus, the "Farmer"

Texts: Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:1-13; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

**ST. JOHN
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

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ANNOUNCEMENT: This service will include Holy Communion so I invite you to have a piece of bread or cracker plus a glass or cup of a beverage that you can partake of.

CALL TO WORSHIP:

Fresh corn dripping with butter,
juicy peaches topping our cereal:
praise is due to you, God of the harvest!
Children chasing fireflies in evening's shadows,
families picnicking in the backyard:
Praise is due to you, God of summer days!

Mothers tightening training wheels on bikes,
fathers teaching kids to bait a hook:
praise is due to you, God of our lives!

CALL TO RECONCILIATION:

We could offer seeds of hope, but don't. We could help a friend with a difficult problem, but won't. We could smooth the way for someone stumbling through life, but can't. Let us confess our harvest of sin to our God, as we pray together, saying,

PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS:

We know the seeds we have sown, Harvesting God: anger which springs from our flinty hearts; bitterness which flows like a rushing river into another's heart; hurtful words which wrap their thorny briars around a friend's kindness; passion which poisons an innocent relationship.

Forgive us, Loving God, and have mercy. Your grace can turn our fallow hearts into rich fields of love. Your hope can smooth the rocks in our way, so we can go to be reconciled to another. Your love for us in Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, can untangle the thorny mess we have made of our lives. Bless us with these gifts, we pray.

Silence is kept

ASSURANCE OF PARDON:

No ifs, no ands, no buts. Now there is no condemnation - period! God answers all our hurts, our wrongs, our sin with salvation. Believe this good news, my friends. We are stunned by your grace, and embraced in your love, Forgiving God, and lift our thanks to you. Amen.

GOSPEL READING: MATTHEW 13:1-9, 18-23

“That day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he climbed into a boat and sat down. The whole crowd was standing on the shore.

³ He said many things to them in parables: “A farmer went out to scatter seed. ⁴ As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. ⁸ Other seed fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one. ⁹ Everyone who has ears should pay attention.”

Explanation of the parable of the farmer

¹⁸ “Consider then the parable of the farmer. ¹⁹ Whenever people hear the word about the kingdom and don’t understand it, the evil one comes and carries off what was planted in their hearts. This is the seed that was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for the seed that was spread on rocky ground, this refers to people who hear the word and immediately receive it joyfully. ²¹ Because they have no roots, they last for only a little while. When they experience distress or abuse because of the word, they immediately fall away. ²² As for the seed that was spread among thorny plants, this

refers to those who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the false appeal of wealth choke the word, and it bears no fruit. ²³ As for what was planted on good soil, this refers to those who hear and understand, and bear fruit and produce—in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one.”

SERMON: “Jesus begins teaching in parables”

Matthew 13 begins the third great teaching discourse of Jesus. However, Jesus’ style of teaching has changed. He speaks with a new cadence; his instructional methods have shifted. Now, for the first time, Jesus begins to teach in parables. (A **parable** is a short fictitious story that is presented to teach a religious principle, simple truth or moral lesson.) Jesus’ instructs turn into tales about farmers, seeds, and soils, by images of women at work baking bread and fishermen casting their nets. A cast of imaginative characters arrives on the scene – masters and merchants, reapers and plow-men.

The disciples ask Jesus why he speaks to them in parables? Jesus probably had as many reasons for speaking in parables as preachers today have for using sermon illustrations: to be more graphic, to make points clearer, to stimulate the imagination, to make contact with the realities of everyday life, and more.

Up to this point in Jesus’ ministry, many people and their leaders have been resistant to Jesus’ message. Some people would rather be “blind” and “deaf” than see and hear that the kingdom has drawn near in Jesus. So, Jesus begins now to focus upon those who will hear and who do see,

namely, his own disciples and the crowds that continue to follow Jesus.

Parables are particularly apt for advanced learners. They are simply profound; that is, they are simple, but, for those with eyes to see and ears to hear, they are also profound, opening up deep insights about the ways of God. (Perhaps you have attended a children's movie or read a children's book, but you recognize themes for adults hidden with the story. That's what parables can be like.)

For those who are ready learners of the gospel, parables unlock the secrets of the kingdom. The reason Jesus speaks in parables, he tells his disciples, is precisely because the people have become hard of heart; "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand" (Matthew 13:13).

Now that you understand a little bit more about parables, use this knowledge every time you read one of these profound stories from Jesus. See if you can hear it more clearly, perceive what Jesus is trying to teach you, and open your hearts to his message. You can start with this one that describes a farmer who throws seed everywhere indiscriminately. What a waste of seeds? But watch what can happen with only a few seeds that can grow into enough for a feast. Amen.



PASTORAL PRAYER:

You open our hearts, O God, to your words and have them take root deep within us, blossoming into gentleness which can comfort a broken heart, into compassion which can transform a cold shoulder into an embrace, into kindness which can make a curmudgeon break into laughter.

You move into our lives, Spirit of life, gently watering the seeds planted in our inept souls until they become bushels of grace. And we are grateful.

Today we pray for all those affected by our pandemic; those who are sick, those who are grieving the loss of a loved one, those who has lost their jobs.

We pray for all the health care workers on the "front lines", working non-stop to care for others.

We pray for those we love who are heavy on our hearts. We wish would could visit those in the nursing homes and hospitals, yet we know it might make them sicker. We pray for all those on our prayer list, may they feel the warm of your love wrapped around them, loving God. We join all in coming to you God in Community, Holy in One, even as we pray together, saying, the Lord's Prayer. . . . Amen.

THANK YOU FOR SHARING: What we offer may not seem significant in a world of so much, Caring God, but we pray they may become seeds of hope, of grace, of change, of life to all those around us. Amen.

HOLY COMMUNION:

May the Sower of grace be with you!

And also with you!

Seeds of hope and joy are planted in you.

May our hearts yield a rich harvest for God.

Join your voices with the valleys and mountains in praise.

We rejoice in the One who welcomes us at this Table.



(Let us pray.) You cast your seeds upon chaos, Sower of creation, and pastures overflowed with flocks, valleys brought forth flowers to welcome you, mountains sang out their praises to you as trees clapped out the beat.

We were shaped in your image to enjoy all these generous gifts, but we chose to walk the rocky paths of sin and death, their thorny temptations choking us off from your hopes for us.

Prophets came to us with joy, hoping to lead us back to you in peace, but we sent them away empty-handed, scattering their words on our sinful paths like bread crumbs left for birds of prey.

Yet you would not leave us condemned, and sent Jesus to accomplish your hopes.

With those whose ears are wide open,
with those who struggle to walk with you,
we lift our words of thanksgiving to you:
Holy, holy, holy are you, God our Presence.
All creations is stunned by your deeds.
Hosanna in the highest!
Blessed is the Sower of the good news.
Hosanna in the highest!

Your holiness fills the earth with hope,
and Jesus Christ is the everlasting sign we will not be separated from you. He walked the dusty paths, picking us up from where the world had cast us aside.
He gathered up all the rocks which fill our lives, so your word might take root deep within us. He prunes all the twisted briars of sin and death so that your resurrection might bloom for us all. As we gather for this memorial feast,

as we seek to hear and understand his words, we proclaim that mystery we know as faith:

**Christ died, condemning sin to death;
God raised Christ, giving him new life;
Christ will come for us again,
refusing to return to God empty-handed.**

The Sower casts out the seeds and the grain comes forth to provide substance for the Bread. The rain and snow refresh the vines, the plump grapes ripened to fill the Cup of life. Your Spirit gathers us these gifts and prepares the Table for your people who, blessed with your presence, go forth to bring hope and life to others; and who, set free from sin and death, go to release neighbors and strangers from hunger, fear, doubts, and loneliness.

We remember on the night when Jesus and the disciples had their last meal together, Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, and gave it to the disciples, saying "This is my body, which is broken for you. Take and eat it, and as often as you do, remember me."

(Hold up the bread.)

In the symbol of the broken bread, we participate in the life of Christ and dedicate ourselves to being his disciples.

In the same way he took the cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to the disciples, saying: "Drink this, all of you. This cup is the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.

(Hold up the cup.)

In the symbol of the cup, we participate in the new life Christ brings.

(Place your hands, palm side down, above the elements.)
Holy Spirit, we ask you to bless this bread and this cup.
Through this meal, make us the body of Christ, that we may
join with you in promoting the well-being of all creation.
Amen. (Partake of the elements)

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING: Let us pray.
We give thanks, loving God, that you have refreshed us at
your table. Strengthen our faith; increase our love for one
another. As we have been fed by the seed that became
grain, and then became bread, may we go out into the world
to plant seeds of justice, transformation, and hope. Amen.

BENEDICTION:
Go forth as God's people to sow seeds of love and joy in the
world.
Go forth as Christ's true friends. to sow seeds of justice and
hope in oppression-strewn paths.
Go forth as the Spirit's love. to sow seeds of peace and
reconciliation in every corner of creation. Amen.

ST. JOHN PRAYER LIST: Barbara Moran, Matt Brown, Kathy
Jeffries, Father Roger Karban, Nelson Libell, Dave Seneczyn,
Eric White, Lori Riess, Charles Chamberlin, Donna Isselhard,
Mitch Nallie, Candy Pearce, Greg Talley, Carol Meyer, Leah
Williams, Pat Holtgrave, Jane Riess, Rich Schmitt, Shari
Hamilton, Charlotte Watson, Becky Ballard.



Please note that our sanctuary is now open for worship every Sunday at 10 am. Masks are mandatory. Entrance from the front door only.

CONFERENCE WIDE BOOK STUDY ON RACISM

Starting Wednesday, July 22 at 6:30 pm, the Justice and Mission Committee will be sponsoring an evening biweekly book study on "White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism" by Robin DiAngelo.

In this best-selling book, author Robin DiAngelo, an anti-racist educator, illuminates the phenomenon of white fragility and challenges the reader to understand racism "as a practice not restricted to 'bad people.'"

This four-session study can be a meaningful first step for well-intentioned white people to engage in the Christ centered work of dismantling racism and seeking equity and justice for black and brown people. Through this book study, we hope participants will become aware of the attitudes

that have maintained the status quo of systems, structures, policies, and practices of oppression. We will examine together white fragility, how it develops, how it protects racial inequity, and what we can do to engage more constructively.

Our Conference Minister, Rev. Shana Johnson, will lead the online experience open to all members of the Conference. In order to participate, please purchase the book and read the corresponding chapters before attending and participating in a session. The book can be purchased at a local bookstore, through an online distributor (such as Barnes and Noble or Amazon), and might be available through your local library. The book is also available in digital form for a Nook or Kindle or audio form. Please make sure you buy the book and not the workbook. Please email Rev. Shana Johnson at sjohnson@iscucc.org to register for the Zoom Gatherings and to receive preparation materials.

The study begins at 6:30 pm via Zoom on Wednesday July 22 and will continue on August 5 and 19 and September 2.