

JUNE 16, 2024
FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
FATHER'S DAY
MARK 4:26-34

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS:

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP: (adapted from Psalm 92:1-4, 12-15)**

Leader: It is good to give thanks to the Holy One, to sing praises to your name, O Most High,

People: To declare your steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night,

To the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre.

For you, O God, have made me glad by your work; at the works of your hands I sing for joy.

The righteous flourish like the palm tree and grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

They are planted in the house of the Holy One; they flourish in the courts of our God.

In old age they still produce fruit; they are always green and full of nectar,

All: Showing that the Divine One is upright; God is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in the Holy One.

***INVOCATION:**

OH GOD, CREATOR OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, WHO GRANTS US LIFE, MAY THE SEEDS OF WISDOM FROM THE ANCIENT SACRED TEXTS GROW WITHIN US SO THAT WE MAY BEAR GOOD FRUIT THAT NOURISHES A HUNGRY WORLD. MAY THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PENTECOST DESCEND UPON US THIS DAY AS WE GIVE THANKS TO YOU HOLY ONE, IN JESUS'S MOST PRECIOUS NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

***OPENING HYMN: "Just a Closer Walk with Thee"**

Sharon and Noah Captain will play the introduction

**(Verse 1) *I am weak, but thou art strong:
Jesus, keep from all wrong;
I'll be satisfied as long as I walk,
let me walk close to thee.***

**(REFRAIN) *Just a closer walk with thee.
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea.
Daily walking close to thee:
Let it be, dear Lord let it be.***

**(Verse 2) *Through this world of toil and snares,
if I falter, Lord, who cares?***

*Who with me my burden shares?
None but thee, dear Lord, none but thee.
(Refrain)*

(Verse 3) *When my feeble life is o'er,
Time for me will be no more;
Guide me gently, safely o'er
To the kingdom shore, to the shore
(Refrain)*

***PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

AS WE GATHER IN WORSHIP, LET US TAKE THIS MOMENT TO CONSIDER OUR NEEDS FOR TRANSFORMATION AND FORGIVENESS. I INVITE YOU TO QUIETLY REFLECT ON OUR NEED FOR GRACE.

People: Dear God, the creator of all things based on love. You created us in your image of love and there have been times we have fallen short of that love, not only to you but to each other and all of creation. I ask for your forgiveness and from you, present today, my siblings, sisters and brothers in Christ. I thank you for the comforting strength and compassion of the Holy Spirit to do better in bringing love and grace and all I do. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

***WORDS OF GRACE:**

SCRIPTURE TELLS US THAT WE HAVE BEEN SHOWN THE WAY TO RECONCILIATION BY THE CHRIST WHICH IS WITHIN US WHENEVER WE TURN TO GOD FOR GUIDANCE AND STRENGTH TO TRANSFORM OUR LIVES FOR A BETTER KINGDOM HERE ON EARTH. KNOW THE PEACE OF THE DIVINE GRACE THAT IS ALWAYS THERE FOR YOU IN THE NAME OF JESUS. AMEN.

***GLORIA:**

SCRIPTURE LESSON: 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

³⁴ Then Samuel went to Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah. ³⁵ Samuel never saw Saul again before he died, but he grieved over Saul. However, the LORD regretted making Saul king over Israel.

Samuel anoints David

16 The LORD said to Samuel, "How long are you going to grieve over Saul? I have rejected him as king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and get going. I'm sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem because I have found my next king among his sons."

² "How can I do that?" Samuel asked. "When Saul hears of it he'll kill me!" "Take a heifer with you,"

the LORD replied, “and say, ‘I have come to make a sacrifice to the LORD.’”³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will make clear to you what you should do. You will anoint for me the person I point out to you.”

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD instructed. When he came to Bethlehem, the city elders came to meet him. They were shaking with fear. “Do you come in peace?” they asked.

⁵ “Yes,” Samuel answered. “I’ve come to make a sacrifice to the LORD. Now make yourselves holy, then come with me to the sacrifice.” Samuel made Jesse and his sons holy and invited them to the sacrifice as well.

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel looked at Eliab and thought, “That must be the LORD’s anointed right in front.”

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, “Have no regard for his appearance or stature, because I haven’t selected him. God doesn’t look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the LORD sees into the heart.”⁸ Next Jesse called for Abinadab, who presented himself to Samuel, but he said, “The LORD hasn’t chosen this one either.”⁹ So Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, “No, the LORD hasn’t chosen this one.”¹⁰ Jesse presented

seven of his sons to Samuel, but Samuel said to Jesse, “The LORD hasn’t picked any of these.”¹¹ Then Samuel asked Jesse, “Is that all of your boys?” “There is still the youngest one,” Jesse answered, “but he’s out keeping the sheep.” “Send for him,” Samuel told Jesse, “because we can’t proceed until he gets here.”¹² So Jesse sent and brought him in. He was reddish brown, had beautiful eyes, and was good-looking. The LORD said, “That’s the one. Go anoint him.”¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him right there in front of his brothers. The LORD’s spirit came over David from that point forward. Then Samuel left and went to Ramah.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 20 Page 631

EPISTLE READING: 2 Corinthians 5:6-17

⁶ So we are always confident, because we know that while we are living in the body, we are away from our home with the Lord.⁷ We live by faith and not by sight.⁸ We are confident, and we would prefer to leave the body and to be at home with the Lord.⁹ So our goal is to be acceptable to him, whether we are at home or away from home.¹⁰ We all must appear before Christ in court so that each person can be paid back for the

things that were done while in the body, whether they were good or bad.

Ministry of reconciliation

¹¹ So we try to persuade people, since we know what it means to fear the Lord. We are well known by God, and I hope that in your heart we are well known by you as well. ¹² We aren't trying to commend ourselves to you again. Instead, we are giving you an opportunity to be proud of us so that you could answer those who take pride in superficial appearance, and not in what is in the heart.

¹³ If we are crazy, it's for God's sake. If we are rational, it's for your sake. ¹⁴ The love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: one died for the sake of all; therefore, all died. ¹⁵ He died for the sake of all so that those who are alive should live not for themselves but for the one who died for them and was raised.

¹⁶ So then, from this point on we won't recognize people by human standards. Even though we used to know Christ by human standards, that isn't how we know him now. ¹⁷ So then, if anyone is in Christ, that person is part of the new creation. The old things have gone away, and look, new things have arrived!

GOSPEL LESSON: Mark 4:26-34

More parables about God's kingdom

²⁶ Then Jesus said, "This is what God's kingdom is like. It's as though someone scatters seed on the ground, ²⁷ then sleeps and wakes night and day. The seed sprouts and grows, but the farmer doesn't know how. ²⁸ The earth produces crops all by itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full head of grain. ²⁹ Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it's harvesttime."

³⁰ He continued, "What's a good image for God's kingdom? What parable can I use to explain it? ³¹ Consider a mustard seed. When scattered on the ground, it's the smallest of all the seeds on the earth; ³² but when it's planted, it grows and becomes the largest of all vegetable plants. It produces such large branches that the birds in the sky are able to nest in its shade."

³³ With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. ³⁴ He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them.

These are the ancient words revealed to us anew.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

MESSAGE: Interpreting Parables

All the scripture texts you have heard this morning have to do with transitions of one type or another; historical, political, theological, or personal. Even last week you might remember when Jesus seems to forsake his mother and siblings, his message to his family and followers was that he had a different vocation, a different mission, and it involved breaking hallowed family ties. God is doing the unthinkable: God is starting a new family, a new holy people, and is doing so without regard for ordinary human family bonds.

Today's Gospel text continues that theme. The author of Mark's Gospel is presenting that something new as the kingdom, and he does so in parables about seed.

As a matter of fact, Chapter 4 in this Gospel is devoted entirely to parables, an interpretation of one of them, and Mark's understanding of the role of parables in the ministry of Jesus. *(Spoiler alert! The next part of this*

message is long, so please bare with me. But I think its important that we know what we're talking about.)

What exactly is a parable? I'm glad you asked. In my small pocket Bible Dictionary it reads, "A PARABLE IS THE STATEMENT OF A SPIRITUAL TRUTH, A LAW OR PRINCIPLE OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD BY MEANS OF A DESCRIPTION OR NARRATION OF FACTS IN THE WORLD OF NATURE OR IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE, WHICH ARE REPRESENTED IN SUCH A WAY AS TO ILLUMINATE FACTS IN THE WORLD OF SPIRIT." Little book, long definition.

In the Oxford Concise Dictionary of the Christian Church it states, "IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS, THE WORD STANDS FOR A WIDE RANGE OF STRIKING SAYINGS, FROM WELL-KNOWN PROVERBS TO SMALL METAPHORS AND ELABORATE ALLERGORIES."

So what is an allegory? *(You know when you look up one word you always have to look up another, sometimes several.)* "In Christian exegesis, one of the traditional ways of interpreting the Bible the parable is in contrast to the literal or historical sense.

The Greek word comes from ancient literary theory and is defined as 'speaking one thing and signifying something other than what is said.'"

In other words, when Jesus is talking about seeds, he is NOT giving a lesson in agriculture.

Okay. Now we all have an idea what parables are. Sort of. So let's go back to our Gospel passage. This is what Mark writes, "³³ With many such parables he continued to give them the word, as much as they were able to hear. ³⁴ He spoke to them only in parables, then explained everything to his disciples when he was alone with them."

This is how Mark understands the parables in Jesus' ministry, Mark is making a general principle out of what he described as Jesus' method.

On the basis of what is said in this chapter several comments on Mark's view of parables can be made.

In the words of Rev. Fred B. Craddock, a very well known preacher and teacher of the 20th century, he states,

"First, parables are not simple little stories used by Jesus so that everyone within the sound of his voice could understand his teaching. On the contrary, not everyone did understand, even though Jesus' offer was to anyone who had ears to hear."

Thank you Dr. Craddock because I don't always understand them either.

"Second, parables are a form of literature that, like poetry, demand a great deal from the listener. In other words, we have to take the time to think about what Jesus is saying.

Parables are not obvious to all and sundry, or to every casual passerby who may or may not make any personal investment in Jesus or the kingdom. Parables, then, have a revealing/concealing quality, creating their own hearers and nonhearers. Those who get it and those who don't.

"Thirdly, those who do hear are an inner circle, not of superior intelligence but of personal attachment. They are 'with Jesus'. But even for these, understanding is not easy, even with Jesus' further instruction.

The explanation can be as difficult to grasp as the parable itself. But the point is, understanding is linked to one's relation to Jesus.

“Fourth, the use of parables by Jesus is not surprising because Jesus was himself a parable of God. Is this true? Is Jesus a parable for God?”

LET'S THINK ABOUT THIS FOR A MINUTE. Dr. Craddock says, **Jesus as the presence of God, as the Son of God, was not obviously so to everyone. He spoke of himself as the lamp, he spoke of light and shadow, of the revealed and the hidden.**

Well, Jesus certainly has the revealing/concealing quality.

Only intentional, intense giving of oneself to him and his message is helpful, effective, or successful for us to be inspired. We have to work at moving the veil back to reveal Jesus' message to us. We may have to ask for help from the Holy Spirit.

Dr. Craddock continues, “And finally, because the subject matter is the mystery of the kingdom, the listener should expect snatches of insight and partial

discoveries rather than mastery of the whole subject matter.”

So, how does Dr. Craddock interpret these two parables. What do they say about the kingdom? If verse 29 which reads (“Whenever the crop is ready, the farmer goes out to cut the grain because it's harvesttime.”) is the key, then the parable says that now is the time to reap the harvest; this is the end time; all that has gone on before was but the growing season.

More likely however, is the interpretation that focuses more upon the growth that takes place totally apart from human effort and from human understanding.

The seed carries its own future inside, and efforts to coerce and force growth are futile.

The kingdom of God is exactly that – the Kingdom of God. The thought both reprimands and encourages

followers of Jesus. We humans cannot coerce or force the growth of the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God belongs to God.

Now The parable of the mustard seed is clearly a word of encouragement for us. Let those concerned, frustrated, or even depressed people impatient by small beginnings, such as the apparent insignificance of the enterprise to which life and resources are committed, take heart. Don't let slow progress discourage us.

Let the vision of the end (“the greatest of all shrubs”) inspire and inform today’s effort, knowing all the while that the end as well as the beginning are God’s doing and not our own. repeat

These words should be comfort to the ear’s of the members of St. John UCC in Fairview Heights. We may be small yet powerful things are happening within this congregation every day. Look for them and marvel at the huge effect these happenings have. Amen.

**SPECIAL MUSIC: Sax Solo – “Give Me Jesus”
Noah Captain arr. Brian Buda**

PASTORAL PRAYER: Our gracious and every loving God, we come to you today with much on our hearts. We have worries and concerns, some spoken some unspoken. At the same time, we come to you with our joys and successes. Thank you, O Holy One, for hearing both and we are grateful.

Today as in many many days, we pray for those affected by the chaos and violence in our world. We pray that “cooler heads” and more compassionate leaders find ways to stop the wars that never have good endings.

We pray for all those who are ill from sickness, accidents, addictions, mental illness, loneliness, poverty, and lack of food, water, and shelter. We do our best to support those agencies that see to the needs of others.

We pray for those affected by the storms, tornadoes, floods, volcanoes, and extreme heat in our southern states.

Dear God, we know that you have heard our prayers and we ask that the comfort of the Holy Spirit be with us today and every day. This we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ who taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER: 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 debts as we forgive our debtors. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

PRAYER RESPONSE: "Precious Lord Take My Hand"
Sharon and Noah

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

We are grateful for the gifts that we receive in our lives. We invite you to participate in this opportunity of generosity to continue the mission of God's Love to the world. We are grateful and thankful.

OFFERTORY: "If I've Forgotten" Ira F. Stanphill

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise God, all creatures here below;
Praise God above you heavenly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen

***PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND DEDICATION:**

O HOLY ONE, WITH GRATITUDE WE OFFER AND DEDICATE THESE GIFTS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF OUR WORK IN CHRIST'S NAME. AMEN.

***CLOSING HYMN: With Noah Captain**

519 "Standing in the Need of Prayer"

***BENEDICTION:**

DEAR FRIENDS, WE HAVE BEEN NOURISHED AND RENEWED THIS DAY, GO OUT AND SPREAD THE SEED OF GOD'S KINGDOM AND LOVE TO ALL YOU ENCOUNTER IN THE DIVINE NAME WHO CREATED US, WHO REDEEMS US, AND WHO SUSTAINS US. GO IN PEACE IN JESUS' NAME. AMEN.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE:

"Let There Be Peace on Earth"

POSTLUDE: "Celebration" James Mansfield