

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 12, 2020

Cross of Glory Lutheran Church
Brooklyn Center, MN

WELCOME

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 of God, by the radical abundance of divine mercy we have peace with God through † Christ Jesus, through whom we have been given 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 Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

WORSHIP SONG

Remind Us

Remind us that the dark comes like
An angel of the light
Remind us though it's funny
That it may not mean it's right
Remind us if we love this world
We cannot love You too
Remind us that the well of life
Is only found in You

And we will remember
To walk in Your Spirit
To dwell in Your Word
And obey when we hear it
To drink from the well
That can quench all our thirst
To turn from what's evil and honor You first
And we will remember to love one another
To honor You Jesus by serving each other
To offer our lives as a true sacrifice
On the altar of worship to You so remind us

Worship Team

Remind us that our treasure
Is the place our heart will be
Remind us that Your Kingdom
Is not of the world we see
Remind us that abundance
Isn't meant to serve our greed
Remind us that the sowing
Is the purpose of the seed

Remind us that the Church is one
In spite of how we live
Remind us that the world will know us
By the love we give
Remind us that our unity
Will show the world the Son
Remind us that abiding in the Vine
Will make us one

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.**

SONG OF PRAISE**Everyday**

What to say Lord
 It's You who gave me life
 And I can't explain
 Just how much You mean to me
 Now that You have saved me Lord
 I give all that I am to You
 That everyday I can
 Be a light that shines Your name

Everyday it's You I'll live for
 Everyday I'll follow after You
 Everyday I'll walk with You (my Lord)

It's You I live for everyday

Worship Team

Everyday Lord
 I'll learn to stand upon Your Word
 And I pray that I
 I may come to know You more
 That You would guide me
 In every single step I take
 That everyday I can be Your
 Light unto the world

It's You I live for everyday
 It's You I live for everyday
 It's You I live for everyday

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you.

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 Savior and Lord. Amen.**

READING: Isaiah 55:10-13

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

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Keith Williams

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The holy gospel according to St. Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Pastor Ali Tranvik

I want to tell you a story about a garden. My husband Isak and I spent the last six years living in Durham, NC, where this past year, we had the opportunity to be part of starting a community garden. We had a small chunk of land, a small grant to begin, and a group of neighbors with varying levels of gardening experience...but equally high levels of excitement.

After tilling the ground, acquiring some tools, and building raised beds, it was finally time to begin planting. We'd received a donated box of seeds that could have filled 20 gardens the size of ours—watermelons, pumpkins, chili peppers, swiss chard, and seven different kinds of tomatoes, to name a few. We got to work digging and planting and eagerly chatting with each other along the way.

Fast forward a few months. I wish I could report on all the delicious vegetables that grew, but the truth is, none of it did. It turns out that the soil was mostly clay, not to mention a tree overhead that was highly acidic and contaminated the ground below, and the nearby city waste site where trash and toxic chemicals in the ground had killed anything that made it past the clay and acid tree. In other words, it was a terrible place to have a community garden.

Today in our Gospel lesson from Matthew, we find ourselves in the dirt. It's another story about some bad soil. It's the parable of the sower, one that's likely quite familiar—a story Jesus tells about a sower who casts seeds on four different kinds of ground: first, the packed ground of a footpath, then ground that's full of rocks, then ground that's thick with thorns, and finally good, fertile ground.

The parable reminds me of that community garden in NC, of all the challenges we faced in that dirt. Maybe it brings to mind gardening failures of your own. But Jesus explains it's meant to be read metaphorically. The word of God, he says, sometimes lands on hard soil, where it's easily snatched up. In other cases, it has no depth to take root so it withers away when challenges arise. Other times it's choked out by thorns, which Jesus identifies as "the cares of the world" and "delight in riches." But sometimes, *sometimes* the word of God lands on good soil, where it can take root and bear fruit.

It's a rare thing for Jesus to interpret his own parables. Usually he leaves his hearers scratching their heads, pondering what these perplexing little stories could possibly mean. But here, we seem to have the parable's meaning straight from Jesus' mouth. It's a kind of mini-sermon of

sorts, (which is to say, maybe it's best for me to wrap up my sermon right now with an "Amen" and take my seat. There's not much hope in out-preaching Jesus after all—especially not on my first Sunday!)

Yet, even with Jesus' explanation, the story of these four different kinds of ground still leaves me with a troubling question: What kind of ground am I on with God? Am I, in other words, "good soil" or "bad soil?" This parable has me worrying about those birds I've got circling above me, the rocks that keep tripping me up, the thicket of thorns I've let get a bit out of control. Of course, I *want* to associate with the good soil, but this parable brings to mind all the ways I've failed and fallen short, all the ways I should tend to and mend and manicure my "field of faith."

Perhaps this parable not only raises the question of what kind of soil *I* am, but what kind of soil *we* are as a church? How can Cross of Glory be a well-tilled, well-weeded, well-fertilized field for the sowing of God's word? How can we produce the best fruit—the most meaningful worship services? The most "likes" on Facebook? The most engaging Bible studies? The programs that will fill our pews with people and our bank account with dollars so that this community can grow and flourish?

While these are fine questions to ask, I want to suggest they're the wrong ones, that there's *another* way to read this parable, that there's actually *more* going on here under the surface. "Listen," Jesus begins, "a **sower** went out to sow." The subject of the story is not the dirt, the ground, the field—it's the *sower*. So, what if this story was not about where the seeds land but about *who* is sowing them, to *how* they're being sown? What if this parable is less about our own successes and failures (about the birds and rocks and thorns in ourselves or in our church) and more about the extravagance of a sower who seems *utterly unfazed* by such concerns?

It does not take very much agrarian expertise to see that this sower is *really bad* at his job. There is no careful planning, no evaluation of soil quality, no taking stock of the condition of the fields to measure the seeds' potential success. This sower is haphazardly sowing seeds everywhere—recklessly *flinging* them, *hurling* them, *lobbing* them, *chucking* them in all directions with holy abandon. If this sower really cared about the harvest, why wasn't he more deliberate? More methodical? More practical? More responsible? Less wasteful!?

We would not do it this way, of course. If we were in charge, we would devise a more efficient operation, a neater, cleaner, more productive one that did not waste seed on the birds and rocks and thorns, but concentrated only on the good soil and what we could make it do (Taylor). But if this is a parable not about the soil but about the sower—not about us but about God—then Jesus seems to be suggesting that there is another way to go about doing things, a way that is less concerned with productivity than with plenitude (Taylor). A way that cares less about end results or measurable outcomes, and more about holy possibility. A way that rejects our preoccupations about failure or scarcity, our warped definitions of fertility, our limited imaginations to see a way out of no way, and instead invites us to pay attention to this **swarm** of seeds being slung at us and all around us...

I have already seen these seeds among *you* here at Cross of Glory. I've seen them in the ways you care deeply for one another, staying connected in this time apart through phone calls and zoom gatherings and prayer. I've witnessed your desire to welcome new neighbors from the vibrant and quickly-changing landscape of Brooklyn Center. To fill this big and beautiful building with people—charter school students, multicultural/multidenominational worshipping communities, neighbors who need a meal, quilters, support groups for those struggling with addiction, local organizers fighting for affordable housing in Brooklyn Center. God is at work sowing seeds of holy possibility in this place!

We do not know what will grow. A friend once said "you can count the number of seeds in an apple, but you can't count the number of apples in a seed" (Smith). We don't know, in other words, what fruit these seeds will someday bear. But we do know that—just like the invisible life that buzzes in the ground beneath our feet—God is moving and alive and at work in us *and* in spite of us.

God looks at hardened or rocky or thorny soil and sows there anyway, imprudently insisting that new life can grow.

When we begin to see that we have a God who is really *really* bad at farming, a God whose love is extravagantly flung at us without condition or qualification or expectation, we begin to hear this parable's deepest call to *us*. "Listen," Jesus says. "You who have ears, hear what the Spirit is saying."

Perhaps this parable is not just a call to be good soil but to also be bad farmers. Just as Jesus walked in the low and barren places of the earth where no one went, formed community with those deemed ill-equipped and unqualified, sowed seeds in places and people where most were convinced nothing would grow, perhaps we too are called into this "malpractice," into "bad farming." Maybe our call is less about producing fruit and more about the holy act of planting—the joyful, reckless act of scattering seeds on whatever ground we find ourselves, foolishly trusting that new life can sprout up in even the most unsuspecting of places or unexpected of people—even in *you* and in *me*. Our call, my friends, is to be bad farmers who risk wasting seeds, trying things that might not "work," failing.

Martin Luther once said, "Even if the world would go to pieces tomorrow, I would still plant my apple tree." Even if there are birds that threaten to pluck it up, or rocks that hinder its roots from growing deep, or thorns that choke it out...even if the conditions are questionable, the outcomes don't look promising, or odds are stacked against it...even if the whole world would go to pieces tomorrow, I would *still* plant my apple tree.

This world may feel like it's going to pieces. Covid-19 has upended life as we know it, causing or exacerbating loneliness, mental health concerns, addiction, domestic violence, unemployment, a widening gap between the rich and poor—problems which are disproportionately affecting communities of color, the imprisoned, the undocumented, and the poor. Meanwhile, our city is experiencing the raw grief of George Floyd's murder, in which the sin of white supremacy has been exposed again for the world to see. The world needs bad farmers right now, people who do the hard and often hopeless work of planting apple trees, that is, God's good news of love and liberation and new life.

That community garden back in NC was an epic failure by any standards. We had not one vegetable to show for. But there was *another* form of growth that took place in the dirt. A group of neighbors—some Duke college students, a group of recently-resettled refugees, an eighth-grader who gave himself the title "lead gardener," a single mom and her fifth-grade daughter who lived across the street, a retired couple from church, and a neighbor who lived in a nearby group home began to form a community. None of us had really planned on or anticipated the friendships that grew there in that unproductive dirt. While we saw an empty vegetable garden, God was sowing something else much greater and more life-giving than any of us could have imagined.

So grab your gardening gloves and let's head out into the dirt. Let's take up this holy work of "bad farming," recklessly sowing the seeds of God's love, seeds that God is already sowing in and around us. I can't wait to see what grows. Amen!

Sources:

- Taylor, Barbara Brown, "The Extravagant Sower" in *The Seeds of Heaven: Sermons on the Gospel of Matthew* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press: 2004).
- Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (Berkeley: Counterpoint, 2015).
- David Henson, "Dirt is Resurrection and God the Bad Gardener," *Patheos*, 2014.
- Elizabeth Johnson, "Commentary on Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23," *Working Preacher*, 2011.
- Gracy Olmstead, "Wendell Berry's Right Kind of Farming," *The New York Times*, 2018.
- Mihee Kim-Kort, "Food Apartheid: The Sustainability of Racial Discrimination," *Sojourners*, 2017.

HYMN OF THE DAY #734 God, Whose Farm is All Creation

- 1 God, whose farm is all creation,
take the gratitude we give;
take the finest of our harvest,
crops we grow that we may live.
- 2 Take our plowing, seeding, reaping,
hopes and fears of sun and rain,
all our thinking, planning, waiting,
ripened in this fruit and grain.
- 3 All our labor, all our watching,
all our calendar of care
in these crops of your creation,
take, O God: they are our prayer.

CONFESSION OF FAITH Apostles' Creed

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,

who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father, and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,

the holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERTORY RESPONSE #550

- 1 On what has now been sown
your blessing, Lord, bestow;
the pow'r is yours alone
to make it sprout and grow.
O Lord, in grace the harvest raise,
and yours alone shall be the praise!

On What Has Now Been Sown

- 2 To you our wants are known,
from you are all our pow'rs;
accept what is your own
and pardon what is ours.
Our praises, Lord, and prayers receive
and to your word a blessing give.

- 3 Oh, grant that each of us,
now met before you here,
may meet together thus
when you and yours appear,
and follow you to heav'n, our home.
E'en so, Amen! Lord Jesus, come!

OFFERING PRAYER

God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is as firm as the ground we walk. Nourish us with the gifts of your farm, that we might share them abundantly and proclaim your reckless love, in our communities and in the world you so love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

God of abundance, you recklessly sow your word in the unprepared, the unpromising, and the unpredictable, expanding our imaginations of fertility and deepening our sense of possibility. May your word live and grow in us, in this church, and in our community, that we might spread the seeds of your extravagant grace and excessive love on whatever ground we walk.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of creation, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We join with them, giving you thanks for the goodness of your creation--for the sun that warms and for rains that replenish. Help us live not according to the myth of scarcity but rather to the reality of your abundance, generously sharing the fruits of the field and working for more equitable and life-giving systems on behalf of all your creation.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of care, surround all those in need with your loving presence. For our brothers and sisters living in prison. For those living with addiction. For those wrestling with depression, anxiety, or loneliness. For those who are unemployed. For those who are unsheltered. For those trapped in situations of domestic abuse or violence. For those oppressed by the sin of racism and white supremacy. For those whose suffering remains invisible or ignored. Equip us to care for all those in need, and to boldly sow the seeds of justice and peace in our neighborhood, city, and world. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God of community, bless all those who share in Cross of Glory's life together, especially in this difficult time apart. Be with staff and council, musicians and money counters, teachers and students at Progeny Academy, those who clean the building and care for the grounds, and all those who are being the church with and for one another through Zoom meetings, phone calls, and prayer. We pray especially for **Bev, Gil, Terry, Carol, Vicky, and Nancy**, and all those in need of your healing and care. Nourish the relationships within this church community, and help us to nurture relationships with our neighbors who live and work in the schools, shelters, stores, and streets of Brooklyn Center. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

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

LORD'S PRAYER *Let us pray together 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.

BLESSING

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. God, the creator, ✠ Jesus, the Christ, and the Holy Spirit, the comforter, bless you and keep you in eternal love. **Amen.**

SENDING FORTH SONG #547

Sent Forth by God's Blessing

- | | |
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| <p>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</p> | <p>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</p> |
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to work for your kingdom and answer your call. give honor to Christ and his name that we bear.

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Christ is with you.

Thanks be to God.

Bible Study continues to meet on Tuesday mornings at 9:30 on Zoom. All are welcome. If you would like be added to the email list or are having trouble accessing the link, email Pastor Ali at atranvik@crossofglory.us.