

Eighth Sunday after Pentecost

July 26, 2020

Cross of Glory Lutheran Church

Brooklyn Center, MN

PRELUDE

Sweet Mercies

Mark Trease

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

Never Gonna Let Me Go

Worship Team

Once I was lost wand'ring in darkness
No life inside no hope in sight
But God called my name and healed my blindness
Set me ablaze now I'm alive with

God's love breaking through my heart of stone
Love breathing to awake my bones
Love reaching out to save my soul
Love never gonna let me go

And now our hearts so full of worship
We can't hold back, We can't contain it
For all He's done Jesus our Savior
We are ablaze and full of thanks for

God's love breaking through our hearts of stone
Love breathing to awake our bones
Love reaching out to save our souls
Love never gonna let us go

God's love breaking through our hearts of stone
Love breathing to awake our bones
Love reaching out to save our souls
Love never gonna let us go
Love calling me as I am
Love making me new again
Love lifting me when I can't
Love never gonna let me go

Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
Come as you are come into His open arms
Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
Come as you are
Come find

Wherever you've been
Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
Come as you are come into His open arms

Love calling me as I am
Love making me new again
Love lifting me when I can't
Love never gonna let me go
Love never gonna let you go
Your love never gonna let us go

Wherever you've been
Whatever you've done
Whatever you've done
Come as you are
And come find God's love.

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

His Mercy is More

Worship Team

What love could remember no wrongs we have done
Omniscient all knowing God counts not their sum
Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore
Our sins they are many His mercy is more

What patience would wait as we constantly roam
What Father so tender is calling us home
He welcomes the weakest the vilest the poor
Our sins they are many His mercy is more

What riches of kindness He lavished on us
His blood was the payment His life was the cost
We stood 'neath a debt we could never afford
Our sins they are many His mercy is more

Praise the Lord His mercy is more
Stronger than darkness new every morn
Our sins they are many His mercy is more

PRAYER OF THE DAY The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Let us pray . . . **God of love, through the death and resurrection of your son you welcome us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, empower us to welcome all as beloved kin, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.**

READING: Romans 8:26-39

²⁶The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. ²⁷And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

²⁸We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. ³⁰And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is

written,

“For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Song of the Mustard Seed

Keith Williams

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

The holy gospel according to St. Matthew.

Glory to you, O Lord.

³¹[Jesus] put before [the crowds] another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field;³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

⁴⁴“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; ⁴⁶on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

⁴⁷“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; ⁴⁸when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. ⁴⁹So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous ⁵⁰and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

⁵¹“Have you understood all this?” They answered, “Yes.” ⁵²And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

SERMON

Pastor Ali Tranvik

It may be summer break right now, in today’s Gospel lesson, we are invited back into a “classroom” of sorts. We are in the middle of section in Matthew where Jesus is teaching his disciples about the kingdom of heaven. And Jesus—ever the rabbi—has all sorts of illustrations (“parables” he calls them) built into his lesson plans. “The kingdom of heaven is like a sower who went out to sow,” we heard a couple of weeks ago. “The kingdom of heaven is like a field of wheat and weeds,” we read last week. And today, he’s got *five* more parables describing God’s kingdom: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard that someone sowed in his field. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman mixes with three measures of flour. The kingdom of heaven is like treasure that someone hides in a field and then sells all he has to buy the field. The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for pearls and selling everything he has to buy one of great value. The kingdom of heaven is like a net full of good fish and bad fish. The good fish are placed in a basket and the bad fish are thrown away. So it will be at the end of the age.”

It's a fast-paced lesson. Lots of metaphors. Lots to digest. Which is why I'm skeptical of the disciples who, when asked if they "understood all this," simply say "yes." It's like when my high school algebra teacher finished a lesson on how to solve quadratic equations and looked at me and said "Do you understand all this?" I too said "yes..." (There are a variety of reasons I became a pastor and not an engineer).

But understanding isn't really the point of Jesus' parables. "Trying to solve a parable," Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber says, "is like trying to nail Jell-O to a tree." Now I've never tried nailing Jell-O to a tree, but I can only imagine would be tricky (and sticky for that matter). Parables, in other words, are stories Jesus tells that are intentionally *hard to pin down*, elusive, perplexing. They're stories that subvert our assumptions and challenge our expectations.

My *expectation* of the Parable of the Mustard Seed, for example, is that this is a story about growth. It's a story a tiny seed that grows into a great big tree. It's a story that tells us that from small beginnings come great endings.

But I did little bit of mustard research this week. And what I learned indeed challenged my expectations. It likely challenged the disciples expectations too. Because as it turns out, mustard seeds apparently *don't* grow into trees. There are plenty of other things that do. If Jesus wanted to liken the kingdom of God to a great big tree, he could have drawn on the image in Ezekiel of a "noble cedar" that provides the kind of shelter birds need (17:23), an image the disciples were likely familiar with and one they were surely expecting Jesus to say instead.

But in Jesus' retelling of that story, he provides a laughable alternative. The kingdom of heaven is like a seed that will grow in the greatest of...shrubs? Is that what we aspire to? What kind of off-brand kingdom is this? Why didn't Jesus just stick with the cedar tree? The cedar tree is much more stately, more dignified, much bigger and better.

It gets worse. It turns out that a mustard plant is not only a gnarly shrub, but it's a shrub that grows like a weed. Pliny wrote a natural history of the time that says: "The mustard plant is a hardy plant that tends to germinate rapidly and take over a garden." In other words, a mustard plant is a scruffy, scrappy shrub that goes where you might not want it to go, paying no attention to the boundaries and borders built to keep it out. We tend to think of growth as a nearly unmitigated good (in a culture where "success" is often defined by having high numbers, whether it be dollars in our bank accounts, members of our congregation, square footage of our home, "likes" on facebook...more is better, right?), but—as was confirmed by a couple folks at Bible study this past week who grew up on farms and who were tasked with weeding out mustard plants as kids—the more mustard plants, the worse off the farm would be. The growth of an invasive species like the mustard seed would be an agricultural disaster!

My mustard research also taught me that according to Jewish law, mustard seeds would not have been sown in the midst of the farmer's field, as the parable describes. You see, there are a variety of different Jewish purity laws, laws intended to help people distinguish what is pure and what is impure. Where things could or could not be planted, and what could be planted together or not together, were important for maintaining purity. One biblical commentator notes that "a mustard seed could not be planted in a garden," where vegetables would be the usual planting. Doing so would be to render the whole garden "impure" (Ormseth).

The next parable Jesus tells, where he likens the kingdom of God to a woman who mixes yeast and flour, draws on this same theme of impurity. Today, yeast comes in tidy little packets, but in biblical times, yeast referred to a rotting, molding lump of bread. It was the bacteria in the mold that made bread rise, but in Jewish culture, yeast—and bread made with yeast—was seen as corrupt and contaminated. In fact, Jews were required to rid their entire house of yeast before celebrating some holy days (Bolz-Weber).

So why does Jesus use *these* metaphors, likening the kingdom of God to an unwanted and uncontrollable weed, or to moldy wad of yeast? There must have been better images to draw from! Images that were a bit cleaner, neater, nicer, purer!?

Now, I want to be clear: I don't think Jesus is saying that all impurity is *good*. Some weeds need to be plucked up (we see in the parable of the fishing net in today's text that the good fish were put into baskets but the bad fish were thrown out). I also don't think Jesus is saying that cedar trees are *bad*. Perhaps the kingdom of heaven *is* like a cedar tree as well. But Jesus' unexpected images in these first two parables invite us to see that God's kingdom is not *only* the grandiose things we look up at and stand in awe of. But perhaps it's *also* the stuff below us, the stuff we see as dirty, different, or disruptive. The stuff we discount, or disregard, or even disdain.

Maybe Jesus uses these unexpected images to contrast the kingdom of heaven and the kingdoms of earth. Maybe Jesus is flipping our notions of "greatness" or "holiness" on their head, saying all these backwards, upside-down things like "whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant" (Matt 20:26) or "the last shall be first and the first shall be last" (Matt 20:16). Maybe Jesus is saying that God's reign has no ambitions of grandeur or might, is not in the business of maintaining law and order at the expense of people's needs, is not interested in hierarchical structures that concentrate wealth and power among a few select elite at the top. This is why some Christians like to use the word "kin-dom" instead of "king-dom." Because kin-dom perhaps more aptly describes God's upside-down kind of reign: A beloved community, a many-membered body, a realm where all treaty with dignity and loved as *kin*.

The kingdom of heaven is a different kind of kingdom because the king is a different kind of king! This is a "king" who came to us as a first-century Jewish peasant, who was born in a barnyard, who laughed at the powerful, and kissed lepers, and befriended prostitutes and ate with all the wrong people. This is a "king" whose crown was thorns, whose throne was a cross, but who kept on living anyway, so that can live as kin.

Where do we see the kin-dom of heaven today? Maybe the kin-dom of heaven is like the weed that is taking over your garden no matter how many times you've tried to pluck it up, or those unsightly shrubs in your neighbor's yard that are creeping over your property line. Maybe the kin-dom of heaven is like a moldy piece of bread in the back of the fridge that your son goes ahead and makes a peanut butter and jelly sandwich anyway to share with his friend who needs a bite to eat.

Where else do we see the kin-dom of heaven here at Cross of Glory? Maybe the kin-dom is a prayer chain, that despite disease or death, keeps on praying. Maybe the kin-dom of heaven is the kin of this church who can't gather in person right now but who are persistently making phone calls to check in on one another in these lonely days. Maybe the kin-dom of heaven are those garden plots out back, that may have literal mustard weeds growing in them (I haven't looked that closely), but whose fruits are tended to and cared for by members and neighbors, and donated to CEAP to go to folks who need fresh produce.

Maybe the kin-dom of heaven is a loving kinship of all those deemed not "great" enough, not successful enough, not holy enough, not pure enough. Rachel Held Evans, a Christian author who died suddenly from medical complications in 2018, put it like this: "The kingdom of heaven is a bunch of outcasts and oddballs [a bunch of underdogs and misfits] gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, and because there is always room for more." Let me say that one more time: "The kingdom of heaven is a bunch of outcasts and oddballs [a bunch of underdogs and misfits] gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, and because there is *always room for more.*"

There was *room* in the branches of that scruffy little mustard shrub. My mustard shrub research this week also taught me that mustard shrubs in reality would not grow strong enough to support birds nesting in the spring. But Jesus says the birds of the air found refuge there, and built their nests in its branches (Matt 13:32). Let us, people of Cross of Glory, be the kin-dom of heaven. Let us take part in this reign that is already running rampant. Let us grow invasive and unruly branches where neighboring birds can build nests. Let us build “a house where love can dwell” (as we’ll sing together in a hymn in just a moment), “a house where all God’s children dare to **dream God’s reign anew** .” * Amen!

*Lyrics from “All Are Welcome” ELW #641

Sources:

- Bolz-Weber, Nadia “Parables, Empire, and the Kingdom of God.” *Sermon*, October 15, 2017.
- Neumark, Heidi. “The Parable of the Nest,” *Sermon*, June 17, 2018.
- Ormseth, Dennis “Care for Creation: Commentary on the Common Lectionary,” *Lutherans Restoring Creation*, 2011.

HYMN OF THE DAY #641 All Are Welcome

Verses 1, 2, 4 and 5

1 Let us build a house where love can dwell
and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell
how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions,
rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:

2 Let us build a house where prophets speak,
and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek
to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness
and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:

Refrain

Refrain

All are welcome, all are welcome,
all are welcome in this place.

4 Let us build a house where hands will reach
beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach,
and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger
bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:

5 Let us build a house where all are named,
their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed
as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries and laughter,
prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:

Refrain

Refrain

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

At this time, you are invited to prepare your offering, which can be mailed to the church office (5929 Brooklyn Blvd, Brooklyn Center, MN 55429). Thank you for the ways you continue to generously support the work of Cross of Glory in this time apart!

OFFERTORY RESPONSE **The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom of God is justice and peace
and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Come, Lord, and open in us

The gates of your kingdom. **(Repeat)**

OFFERING PRAYER

God of goodness and growth, all creation is yours, and your faithfulness is as firm as the heavens. With what you have generously given us, help us now to generously share, so that all your children may know the abundance of your kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS of the PEOPLE

And now in the confident hope that nothing can separate us from the love of God, let us pray for the church, the world, and all those in need...

God who welcomes, your kin-dom turns our notions of greatness upside down and embraces all as beloved kin. Like a mustard shrub, help us grow branches that provide a welcoming refuge for all our neighbors in need, especially those who are unsheltered or longing for a place to call home. As we pray that your kin-dom comes, we also pray for the kingdoms of this world and for the leaders who govern them. Guide presidents and prime ministers, governors and state senators, mayors, and school board members in the ways of justice and peace, and help us all to live out your unconditional and uncontrollable love in this life together we share. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who reigns, your kin-dom is revealed to us in ordinary things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways that you dwell among us in daily life. We give you thanks for the ways that you are present with this church community as we seek to be present with one another, even in this time of physical distance. Bless all those who minister here, and refresh us with renewed imaginations as we seek to be your kin-dom in this place and time. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who creates, we give you thanks for the seeds that grow in the ground, for the farmers who work in the fields, and for the ways the land feeds and sustains us. Forgive us for the ways we fail to be good stewards of your creation, and empower us to care for all your creatures, from the birds of the air to the fish of the sea. Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

God who loves, your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes when we do not have the words. Surround those who are suffering with your loving presence, especially those whose suffering as been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Give peace to the dying, refuge to the weary, comfort to the lonely, justice to the oppressed, and healing to the sick, especially Bev, Gil, Terry, Carol, Vicky, Nancy, and Laura. Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

For these prayers and all those too deep for words, may your Spirit now intercede; through Jesus Christ our life and hope. **Amen.**

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 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 #588 **There's a Wideness in God's Mercy verses 1, 3 and 4**

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|---|---|
| <p>1 There's a wideness in God's mercy,
like the wideness of the sea;
there's a kindness in God's justice
which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth's sorrows
are more felt than up in heav'n.
There is no place where earth's failings
have such kindly judgment giv'n.</p> <p>4 'Tis not all we owe to Jesus;
it is something more than all:
greater good because of evil,
larger mercy through the fall.
Make our love, O God, more faithful;
let us take you at your word,
and our lives will be thanksgiving
for the goodness of the Lord.</p> | <p>3 For the love of God is broader
than the measures of our mind;
and the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.
But we make this love too narrow
by false limits of our own;
and we magnify its strictness
with a zeal God will not own.</p> |
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DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Christ is with you.
Thanks be to God.

Community Announcements

- Thanks to those who have signed up for a Meet-and-Greet with Pastor Ali! An additional morning session has been scheduled for Thursday 8/6 at 10 am at Wilma Frantz's home. Please reach out to Sue in the office (svukelich@crossofglory.us) if you'd like to RSVP.
- Bible Study meets Tuesday mornings at 9:30 am on Zoom. We'd love to have you take part as we explore the texts for the coming Sunday. Email Pastor Ali (atranvik@crossofglory.us) if you'd like to be added to the email list.