

SUNDAY, JUNE 13, 2021
3RD SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Call to Worship

Leader: O God, grant us courage,
People: so we may walk by faith, not by sight.
Leader: Whether we are at home or away, we seek to please God.
People: For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Prayer of Adoration

God of all wisdom, Truth and Wisdom Incarnate, Spirit of truth and wisdom, we come before you in worship to hear your word as it is written, and to commune with you in Spirit. Teach us in these moments what we need to know and inspire us for what we ought to do; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Hymn 338 *Let all things now living*

Prayer of Confession

Holy God, though you are beyond our line of sight and we walk by faith, we believe that you are always aware of us and what we do. We know that we are tested. We confess that our behavior is neither as good nor as bad as it might be. We are not as keen for your acceptance as we might be. As exiles on this planet, we are anxious to leave the testing grounds behind us, to live beyond all danger of failure. Forgive all our badness for the sake of Jesus Christ and the goodness he shares with us. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

L: Friends, hear the good news! Those who are planted in the house of the Lord will flourish in the courts of our God.
P: We are eager to declare that the Lord is just, in him there is no wrong.
L: Friends, believe the good news!
P: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

Hymn 674 *In the bulb there is a flower*

Mission Capsule - Meeting the Needs of Families in Beirut

The massive explosion that struck the city of Beirut in August, 2020, left many people injured and many homes damaged. Presbyterian World Service & Development (PWS&D) responded to the devastating effects by meeting the needs of vulnerable people in Lebanon. Families received essential supplies, such as food and hygiene items, to sustain them as they started to rebuild. Additionally, PWS&D assisted in restoring homes and schools and provided water and sanitation kits to families, as well as school kits to children.

Readings

Ezekiel 17: 22-24	Israel finally exalted.
Psalms 20	Trust in God rather than horses or chariots.
2 Corinthians 5: 1-17	Living and trusting through faith in God.
Mark 4: 26-34	Parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed.

Hymn 787 *The kingdom of God is justice and joy*

SERMON: BETWEEN THE PLANTING AND THE HARVESTING!

The recent and ongoing conflict between the state of Israel and the Palestinians raises the issue of land in a most contentious way. The issue of land in fact permeates the Old Testament. It should not then be surprising that Jesus tells parables about the land and its connection to the people.

There is in fact an analogy between the story of the Israelites and land and our own story in this country. We, as a church have accepted the reality of how Israel encountered people who were living in a particular land for centuries, only to be removed by force by Israel. The inhabitants of Canaan were brutally pushed aside, as seen in the book of Judges.

Two colonial powers fought over this country, and pushed the original inhabitants aside to reservations. Then, children were taken away from parents and put in residential schools, and their way of life, their self-esteem and pride were ripped asunder.

With all of that before us we say God is in charge. One shouldn't be surprised if many, maybe most, would say, I doubt that! It seems we need to be trained to realize that God is in charge, since it is not obvious to the naked eye.

Jesus tells a story about a person throwing seed on a field and then going to bed and forgetting about it. The seed sprouts and grows – he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help. That is what the kingdom of God is like, or that is the way God is in charge.

Then Jesus says, **“How can we picture God’s kingdom? What kind of story can we use? It is like a mustard seed, which when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade.”**

This image of shelter offering branches is found in other places in the Bible. In Judges, when Jotham criticizes Abimelech’s murderous grab for power in the Israelite confederacy (9:1-21), the olive, fig, and vine all refuse their productive tasks to become “king.” The bramble (thorn!) however, says, **“If you’re serious about making me your king, come and find shelter in my shade. But if not, let fire shoot from the bramble and burn down the cedars of Lebanon.”**

In today's reading from Ezekiel, another tree parable protests against royal domination. Ezekiel is trying to persuade Israel's rulers to remain faithful to God, even though they dwell in the shadow of the tall cedars of the surrounding empires, and to resist the temptation to make military alliances.

God promises to raise up Israel that it, **“will grow, putting out branches and fruit, birds of every sort and kind will live under.”**

Jesus, in referring to this tree parable, is placing the story in an anti-imperial, anti-colonial context. In Mark's time in Palestine, he was speaking to a small persecuted minority. What chance did the followers of Jesus have against the powers? The parable of the mustard seed provides the answer.

If there is one thing we can perhaps all agree on, it is that this whole world needs a lot of help. The challenge of stories like Jesus tells us today is to trust that God is ultimately in charge. The person sowing the seed in this story is trusting that God can finish what has been started.

Martin Luther the German Reformer was digging into the gospel while Germany was in turmoil. One day someone complimented Luther for his leadership of the Christian revival in Germany, to which Luther responded: **“Oh, I have little to do with it.”** But Dr. Luther, you are a wonderful preacher!, and again Luther responded: **“Well, I preach my sermons, but then I go home to drink my Wittenburg beer, and wait for the Holy Spirit to get to work.”**

Frederick Buechner tells the story of a Princeton history professor rebuking a preacher with all the terrible things that Christians have done in the name of Christ. He is thorough and has a long list. The preacher's name is Bebb. Bebb then responds, **“Professor, I agree the world is full of manure, but look closely at the manure, and when you see something green growing, that is the hand of God.”**

God is where something is growing out of the decay and rot. God is where there's something no bigger than the head of a pin starting to inch up out of the stink and the dark towards the light of day.

God so loved the world that he gave his only son into that worldly mess with the rest of us, so something green could happen, something small and green and hopeful. Now we do what we can. But in the end the gospel, the kingdom, and the recreation of the world is not about us. We do a part, and we trust God with everything else.

That's what Jesus says, and he follows that by going to sleep, for later that day he said to the disciples: **“Let's go across to the other side.”** They took him in the boat and other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping!

As the story in Genesis tells us, God works for six days, but on the seventh day he takes a break, God rests. This is the mystery at the heart of today's story. So let us scatter our seeds and give God space to work. Amen.

Prayers of the People

O God, you cause us to dream dreams and see visions. Reveal yourself to our spirits at this time so we might be awakened to your mission. We know that we have often sought to hide in an indifference that seeks to be left alone.

O God, we pray for a vision of your newness, where the old has passed away and the new has come; when the coldness of yesterday has fled before the sun, and the flower long forgotten has opened in the morning dew. O God, while the world sleeps, the silent sower sows the seeds, and no amount of frost nips their blossoms. These are the mysterious seeds of the kingdom, yielding the flower of faith and blossom of truth.

Awaken us, O God, to this calling, to trust you, who through us, your servants, plant seeds. Scatter your seeds and we shall baptize them. Tuck them into good soil, and we shall pluck the weeds. Multiply them, and we shall harvest. The bounty of that harvest shall be your joy, and its plenty shall be our hope. For as the seasons of the field change, so too the seasons of the heart; and where there was cold, now there is warmth.

O God, we pray for our country and our common humanity. Keep us from division because of race, color and creed. Help us to know that we are not self-created, but that all life comes from you, and that we are accountable to you for what we do with our time here on earth. Save us we pray from blind hatred and wild vengeance that so often injure and kill the most innocent.

We pray for the sick and those who have recently been bereaved. Guide all families who are in need of making adjustments because of this pandemic or other issues that fracture loving relationships.

God of all times and places, we are mindful and thankful for all your servants who, having been faithful to you here on earth, now are with you in your eternal kingdom. Keep us in communion with them until we meet with all your children in the joy of that kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Hear our prayers as we say in the words Jesus taught us... Our Father....

Hymn 716 Pray for the wilderness

Commissioning/Benediction.

May God the creator bless and guide you. May God in Christ shine in you and be known through you. May God the Holy Spirit open the way before you and travel with you. Amen.