



St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wilton, WI
8th Sunday after Pentecost
July 26, 2020
**Inviting People to Journey with Christ's
Family in Spreading God's Love and Mercy**

Gathering

*The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God**

As Solomon prays for wisdom, we seek to more deeply know the treasures of faith. In today's gospel Jesus offers everyday images that reveal to us the reign of God: a tree that becomes a sheltering home, yeast that penetrates and expands, a treasured pearl, a net that gains a great catch. Even as we seek the riches of God's reign, the great surprise is that God's grace finds us first!

My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less



- 1 My hope is built on noth-ing less than Je-sus' blood and righ-teous-ness;
- 2 Whendark-ness veils his love-ly face, I rest on his un - chang-ing grace;
- 3 His oath, his cov - e - nant, his blood sus - tain me in the rag - ing flood;
- 4 When he shall come with trum-pet sound, oh, may I then in him be found,



no mer-it of my own I claim, but whol - ly lean on Je - sus' name.
in ev - 'ry high and storm - y gale my an - chor holds with-in the veil.
when all sup-ports are washed a-way, he then is all my hope and stay.
clothed in his righ-teous-ness a-lone, re - deemed to stand be - fore the throne!

Refrain



On Christ, the sol - id rock, I stand; all oth - er ground is



sink - ing sand, all oth - er ground is sink - ing sand.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Beloved and sovereign God, through the death and resurrection of your Son you bring us into your kingdom of justice and mercy. By your Spirit, give us your wisdom, that we may treasure the life that comes from Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

Amen.

Word

*God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.**

FIRST READING

Because Solomon did not ask for long life, riches, or the defeat of his enemies, God gave him what he asked for: wisdom to govern the people well.

1Kings 3:5-12

⁵At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." ⁶And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. ⁷And now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. ⁸And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. ⁹Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people?"

¹⁰It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, ¹²I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you."

P: The word of the Lord. C: **Thanks be to God.**

Psalm 119:129-136

¹²⁹Your decrees are wonderful;
therefore I obey them with all my heart.

¹³⁰**When your word is opened it gives light;
it gives understanding to the simple.**

¹³¹I open my mouth and pant
because I long for your commandments.

¹³²**Turn to me and be gracious to me,
as you always do to those who love your name.**

¹³³Order my footsteps in your word;
let no iniquity have dominion over me.

¹³⁴**Rescue me from those who oppress me,**

and I will keep your commandments.

¹³⁵Let your face shine upon your servant
and teach me your statutes.

¹³⁶**My eyes shed streams of tears,
because people do not keep your teaching.**

SECOND READING

These words celebrate the depth of God's actions for us. Through Christ's death for us and the activity of the Spirit praying for us, we are fused to God's love poured out in Jesus Christ. Nothing, not even death itself, is able to separate us from such incredible divine love.

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.

P: The word of the Lord. C: **Thanks be to God.**

Gospel Acclamation



Throughout Matthew's gospel, Jesus and his disciples proclaim the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near!" Here, Jesus offers several brief parables that explore the implications of this announcement for people's lives.

The gospel according to Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

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.

⁴⁵Again, 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.

⁴⁷Again, 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."

P: The gospel of the Lord. C: **Praise to You, O Christ.**

Sermon

Matthew 13:31-33, 44-52

As we consider our gospel passage for today, we could begin by looking at the parable of the mustard seed in comparison to the Coronavirus pandemic. We know that the Coronavirus began in a single location and spread from there. We know that the Coronavirus once contracted, spreads exponentially, with one person giving it to others, who give it to others, and so on. This is what happened, and what is continuing to happen. Infection in one location in one country, spread to multiple persons, locations, and countries throughout the world. A tiny, invisible virus, has grown exponentially, to larger and larger proportions.

Let us consider another example from our present day. A recent newspaper article ("A life of Pushing Hard at Every Step," Jennifer Levitz and Melissa Korn, *Wall Street Journal*, July 18-19, 2020, pg. C1-C2), described William "Rick" Singer, who has received negative attention for his role in the college admissions scandal. Years ago, he "volunteered to coach a slumping team of middle-schoolers at the Jewish Community Center." He was a challenging coach who pushed the children very hard, but he also helped them achieve

victory. His pursuit of wealth and fame coupled with lies, increased in his successive roles. Eventually, he caused more and more people to lie, as well. The lies escalated to the point that he was collecting huge amounts of money to get young adults of wealthy parents into selective colleges. His sins included not only lies, but other forms of deception related to the students' test scores, sports team affiliations, their academic and/or athletic prowess, and more. What started as one person's lies and unrelentless pushing for more and more money and fame, escalated out of control, resulting in more and more persons involved in a web of lies and corruption.

While these examples are of negative ways this first parable might be considered, Jesus uses this parable as an example of the ways in which something small can grow into something larger and even become something of great value. A small mustard seed can grow into a large, thriving shrub 10 feet tall! The mustard seed is so tiny that it is hard to imagine that it could grow to such an enormous size.... but it can. And this is how our faith can grow. Though it may have very small beginnings, with care and tending, it can be fruitful and grow into something much larger. It can grow into something of great value. This too, is how the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, grows. The kingdom of God had the smallest beginnings, yet it grew and continues to grow to this day and forevermore.

In researching the parables for today, a commentary by Barbara Reid is thought to contain the explanation used in the earliest times. It is the belief that Jesus' word planted in others will eventually create a good harvest, even though the beginnings that they were seeing did not give evidence of this possibility. Faith grows in believers through the work of the Holy Spirit when we hear God's word. And, that tiny seed, with care and tending, can produce a large, growing, thriving faith! To those who heard this parable in the earliest times, "The choice must be made whether to be included with the "insiders" who struggle to understand and follow Jesus or to stand outside looking but not seeing, hearing but not listening." (*The Lectionary Commentary*, Barbara Reid, p. 206) It is a choice about one's future in the kingdom of God.

What is your earliest recollection of God, the Christian faith, church, etc...? What do you recall about your years as a Christian? Did you always have a desire to grow, to learn more, to understand and to follow Jesus? Have you perhaps, at times, felt as if you were outside "looking but not seeing, hearing but not listening?"(Reid). As we consider each of the parables, let us be mindful of how our faith has evolved to its

present state and what is possible in the future.

This pericope includes not one or two, but five parables! Using a commentary by Holly Hearon, we note some similarities between them. While each may at first seem unique, they are in fact connected to the theme of the kingdom of heaven. The first two parables are from Chapter 13, verses 31-33; the parable of the mustard seed and the parable of the yeast. Both, "draw attention to remarkable growth arising from insignificant beginnings." The third and fourth parables, from verses 44-46; the parable of the treasure hidden in the field and the parable of the pearl, "point to discovering something of such great value that we are willing to sell all we have to possess it." The word "hide," is used in both--the yeast, or leaven, is hidden in the dough, and the treasure is hidden in the field. The final parable (from verses 47-50) is about a net being thrown into the sea. The net becomes filled with many different types of fish, but once it is brought to shore, the good fish are separated from the bad. God's word tells us that so too will the righteous be separated from the evil in the kingdom of heaven.

This fifth parable also relates to the larger theme of Chapter 13. It connects these verses to the parable of the weeds, our lectionary gospel text from last Sunday. While our sermon of last week was about the parable of the sower, the parable of the weeds describes how the weeds (or tares) can choke off the life of the wheat. The farmer allows them to grow together, but carefully separates the wheat from the weeds when it is time to harvest. Only the wheat is kept, not the weeds.

Our parables tell us that the kingdom of heaven is something that has had "remarkable growth arising from insignificant beginnings" (Reid). The kingdom of heaven can be something that is "of such great value that we are willing to sell all we have to possess it" (Reid). The kingdom of heaven is a place where at the end of the age, "the angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous" (vs. 49).

Jesus' word is for all to hear, but we must not harden our ears, our minds, our hearts, ourselves to hearing Jesus' message. If we do not harden ourselves to hearing God's word, the power of the Holy Spirit works in us. Though we may not always understand it because of our human limitations, with God's care and tending, we can understand God's word for us. Through God's power, our faith can grow and we can develop a mature faith; a faith that carries with it a desire to share our faith with others. For God sent God's only son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross to atone for the sins of all humanity. Yes, we who believe in him will struggle

with sinfulness. We will fall short of Jesus' hopes for us. But if we have faith as small as a mustard seed, through God's power, we can grow, and thrive, and be faith-filled people of God. We can also bring others to know God. We can collectively live as the body of Christ; growing in God's love, growing as God's holy people, growing exponentially one with another as God's children in the kingdom of God. For this, we give praise and thanks to God, whose grace and love for us has opened the way, so that we might have eternal life. Life abundant with God, through God's care and tending. With God's help, all things are possible. What may seem small and even insignificant in the beginning, has the ability to grow into something of great value. Thanks be to God for God's amazing love. Amen.

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.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Confident of your care and helped by the Holy Spirit, we pray for the church, the world, and all who are in need.

Merciful God, your reign is revealed to us in common things: a mustard shrub, a woman baking bread, a fishing net. Help your church witness to the surprising yet common ways you encounter us in daily life. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

When your word is opened, it gives light and understanding. Increase our understanding and awe of your creation; guide the work of scientists and researchers. Treasuring the earth, may we live as grateful and healing caretakers of our home. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

As the birds of the air nest in branches of trees, gather the nations of the world into the welcoming shade of your merciful reign. Direct leaders of nations to build trust with each other and walk in the way of peace. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

Your Spirit helps us in our weakness and intercedes for the saints according to your will. Help us when we do not know how to pray. Give comfort to the dying, refuge to the weary, justice to those who are oppressed, and healing to the sick especially Katie, Bill, Dakota, Carla, Ruth, Judy, Alrita, Dick, Donna, Brad, Lisa, Pam, Jim, and all those we name aloud and in our hearts. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of the seasons, in the midst of summer, give us refreshment, renewal, and new opportunities. We pray for the safety of those who travel. We pray for those who cannot take the rest they need. We pray for those affected by the Coronavirus. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

God of life, those who have died in you shine like the sun in your endless kingdom. We remember with thanksgiving the saints of all times and places and saints close to us. Gather us with them on the day of salvation. Lord, in your mercy,
hear our prayer.

In the certain hope that nothing can separate us from your love, we offer these prayers to you; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

SENDING

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.*

Savior, like a Shepherd Lead Us



1 Sav - ior like a shep-herd lead us; much we need your ten - der care.
2 We are yours; in love be - friend us, be the guard-ian of our way;
3 You have prom-ised to re - ceive us, poor and sin - ful though we be;
4 Ear - ly let us seek your fa - vor, ear - ly let us do your will;



In your pleas-ant pas-tures feed us, for our use your fold pre-pare.
keep your flock, from sin de - fend us, seek us when we go a - stray.
you have mer - cy to re - lieve us, grace to cleanse, and pow'r to free.
bless - ed Lord and on - ly Sav - ior, with your love our spir - its fill.



Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, you have bought us; we are yours.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, hear us chil - dren when we pray.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, ear - ly let us turn to you.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, you have loved us, love us still.



Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, you have bought us; we are yours.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, hear us chil - dren when we pray.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, ear - ly let us turn to you.
Bless-ed Je - sus, bless-ed Je - sus, you have loved us, love us still.

Text: attr. Dorothy A. Thrupp, 1779–1847
Music: BRADBURY, William B. Bradbury. 1816–1868

P: Go in peace. Serve the Lord.
C: **Thanks be to God.**

IN OUR PRAYERS

Katie Wallace, Bill Collar, Dakota Holiday, Carla Von Haden, Ruth Johnson, Judy Bever, Alrita Ornes, Dick Krause, Donna Welch, Brad Bever, Lisa Rhodes, Jim Bender, Pam Liefke

IN THE MILITARY

Jacob Picha, Todd Nofsinger, Dylan Dougherty, Danelle Dougherty, Seth Tormoen, Robert Cale.

CONTACTS DURING CORONAVIRUS CLOSURE

In case of emergency, contact Pastor Cathleen, via text, 608-865-1074, Justin Arndt (608-435-6336) (414-587-6642) or Nalani Bever (608-387-2311).

To activate the prayer chain, please contact Nalani or Louise Buchholz (608-435-6435).

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Last Wednesday, I mentioned in my midweek letter that fishing is a good outdoor activity for individuals and families during this time of the Coronavirus Pandemic. Earlier this week, I read an article in the *La Crosse Tribune* about Al Louis, who is using his love of fishing to raise money for charity ("Reeling it in for local nonprofits," Olivia Herken, July 22, 2020, pgs. A1, A7). While on a fishing trip last year, "a thought occurred to him that he could be using his hobby to help his community." A fundraiser was developed from this thought. People pledge a dollar amount for every musky he catches, or they can donate a set amount. Since muskies are hard to catch, he hopes to get a minimum of 4 (although his record from seasons' past was 8). Most of the money raised will go to an agency that assists victims of abuse, but 4 other agencies will also receive funds. So far, \$14,000 has been raised out of his stated goal of \$20,000. He is hoping to double that amount.

There have been other persons in the news in recent weeks who are using this time of the pandemic to raise money for various charities. For example, Captain Tom Moore, the military veteran in England who at 100 years-of-age walks with his walker to raise money for the UK's National Health Service (CNN online, July 7, 2020); Daniel Del-Carpio, a 17-year old from La Crosse, who following his "simple, long-held conviction: It is our duty to do good," will be performing a virtual piano concert to raise money for people with disabilities ("A Chance to Give Back," *La Crosse Tribune*, Emily Pyrek, Thursday, July 23, 2020, pg. A4, A5); Jason Kiley, a man from Viroqua who has shaved off his award-winning, 2-foot long beard, to raise money for the African American Roundtable in Milwaukee (Fox 6 Now.com, June 30, 2020), and so on. All of these individuals are using their abilities/talents/skills to help others.

It is heartening to see these examples of people doing things that they enjoy while also helping others in their community, state, or country. Like the parable of the mustard seed in our sermon today, all of these examples began with a tiny idea, that with care and tending, has grown into something much, much larger. They have grown from something that perhaps gives one person joy, to something that gives many persons joy.

Peace,

Pastor Cathy