

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, AUGUST 6, 2023

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

18th SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord...
All: **...for we know the Lord's mercy!**
One: Let us sing the praises of our God...
All: **...for we have seen God's greatness!**
One: So, let us join and sing...
All: **...of the blessings of the Lord our God.**

***OPENING HYMN** "Creator of Mountains" StF 2061

1. **Creator of mountains, of glaciers and streams,
Great Splasher of fountains and Dreamer of dreams,
we gather in wonder and praise for your grace.
Responding, we ponder our work in this place.**
2. **Creator of peoples and races and tribes,
not bound by church steeples or what myth describes,
we celebrate now our diversity here,
in penitence vow to accept and not fear.**
3. **Created for caring for all human need,
we seek to be daring in thought and in deed.
Turn us from all strife that demeans or divides.
Reform us for life that empow'rs and abides.**
4. **Creator of river and forest and snow,
Eternal Life-giver whose presence we know,
your voice is resounding in storm, wind, and wave.
Your love is abounding, embracing to save.**

(continued...)

**5. Great God, now we come, our hearts grateful for days
when faith, like a drum-beat, keeps steady our praise.
In song and rejoicing hopes stir and arise,
our spirits now voicing their hymns to the skies.**

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Music: ST. DENIO, Welsh folk melody; arr. *Caniadau y Cyssegr*, 1839. Public Domain.

UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**God of mystery, God of life,
we imagine that we are capable judges
of power and wisdom and goodness.
We trust our own standards;
we separate and categorize;
we mark the performance of others.
We fail to trust your power, hidden in all things.
We fail to watch for you, working out your purposes.
We confess that we have turned away from you
and have not lived with upright hearts.
Forgive us for failing to follow you.
Guide our feet to walk in your ways
and serve your world
to the glory of your name. Amen.**

SILENT CONFESSION

ASSURANCE OF PARDON *(from Romans 8)*

One: What then are we to say about these things?
If God is for us, who is against us?
Sisters and brothers, nothing we have done,
nothing we will ever do,
is enough to separate us from the love of God
made known in Jesus Christ.

All: **We proclaim the good news and share this assurance: In Jesus Christ,
we are forgiven.**

THE PEACE

One: The peace of Christ be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Matthew 13:31-33,44-52

MATTHEW 13:31-33,44-52 (J.B. Phillips New Testament)

³¹⁻³² *Then he put another parable before them: "The kingdom of Heaven is like a tiny grain of mustard-seed which a man took and sowed in his field. As a seed it is the smallest of them all, but it grows to be the biggest of all plants. It becomes a tree, big enough for birds to come and nest in its branches."*

³³ *This is another of the parables he told them: "The kingdom of Heaven is like yeast, taken by a woman and put into three measures of flour until the whole lot had risen."*

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⁴⁴ *"Again, the kingdom of Heaven is like some treasure which has been buried in a field. A man finds it and buries it again, and goes off overjoyed to sell all his possessions to buy himself that field."*

⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶ *"Or again, the kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he has found a single pearl of great value, he goes and sells all his possessions and buys it."*

⁴⁷⁻⁵⁰ *"Or the kingdom of Heaven is like a big net thrown into the sea collecting all kinds of fish. When it is full, the fishermen haul it ashore and sit down and pick out the good ones for the barrels, but they throw away the bad. That is how it will be at the end of this world. The angels will go out and pick out the wicked from among the good and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be tears and bitter regret."*

⁵¹ *"Have you grasped all this?" "Yes," they replied.*

⁵² *"You can see, then," returned Jesus, "how every one who knows the Law and becomes a disciple of the kingdom of Heaven is like a householder who can produce from his store both the new and the old."*

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON

"Do You Really Want That Mustard Seed Growing in Your Garden?"

by Pastor Bill Vincent

It really is tiny ... the mustard seed. Proverbially the smallest thing to be seen by the naked eye.

And along with yeast, they both demonstrate surprising growth – unseen (or barely visible), remarkable – and God's doing.

But also...

Well, yeast was considered unclean, corrupt. Obviously it was necessary for having the bread rise. But then remember there was the celebration of Passover, when all leaven had to be eliminated from the house.

David Waugh describes it this way:

The leavening agent of the time was created by setting aside a portion of leftover bread to spoil, in order to create leaven used in future baking. Not spoiled enough, it is worthless and cannot cause the new batter to rise. Allowed to spoil too long, it not only ruins the bread but can result in food poisoning. (*Feasting on the Word*, “Exegetical Perspective”)

And here Jesus goes along and says the kingdom of heaven is like yeast!
What inarnation is he thinking?

The mustard seed image may not have had any better press.

For, in many cases, the mustard seed was considered a weed: an unwanted plant in the midst of a field of crops.

What was Jesus thinking, using such distasteful images?

Could it be that the kingdom actually comes through the likes of the yeasty and mustard seedy?

Not through the unleavened Pharisaic types, nor the cultivated crop-like scribes.

But through yeasty, in the way, not-what-you’d-expect, not-where-you-want-them-to-be situations and influences ... and people?

On a family vacation, we were staying south of the city and ended up taking the commuter train into Boston.

On our train car was a man whose teeth were all awry: they showed when he smiled broadly (which he did a lot). He was unkempt in his dress. And he couldn’t really speak: he could make noise. But he had a device he would type on that would speak for him.

He was the person most people would have avoided on the train. The person most people would have avoided making eye contact with.

But he reached out to us, and we got to talking with him. He was the friendliest person on our car. And he was the most gracious, helpful, welcoming host to the city of Boston. He told us what station to get off at; where to go, and how to get there.

Mustard seed-y.

Even mustard weed-y.

Maybe the point of these parables is the good news that God can and does work through the yeasty, mustard seedy aspects of life, even human life, even our life: the throw-aways, the sinners and tax collectors.

And we may come to discover that amazing truth quite by accident, stumbling upon it as if finding a hidden treasure.

Or we may come to discover that wonderful, grace-filled truth intentionally, after long searching for a pearl of great value.

And our response to that truth, to that discovery?

I wonder.

Are we too often expecting the kingdom in a certain way, with certain expectations and parameters: it has to look like this, but not that; it has to sound like this, but not that.

On yet another trip, we found ourselves in the Jamestown/Williamsburg area of Virginia where we learned of some of the Native American gardening techniques:

One of the most commonly used Native-American gardening techniques was Three Sisters. This method involved planting corn, squash and bean seeds together in a mound of dirt. Each of these three seeds gave something to the growing process. The beans provided nitrogen for the soil, the corn was a natural trellis and the squash was a cover for the other two plants as they were growing and also helped to deter pests. (Off the Grid News - <http://www.offthegridnews.com>)

An elegant design.

But not the neat and orderly way the European colonists thought it should be, with a straight row of this plant, and a straight row of that plant.

Nowadays we hear the ‘disturbing’ news that the center of Christianity is no longer Europe or North America, but Africa and Asia. And Third World countries are sending missionaries to the United States.

Could it be that God is at work, growing the kingdom, in such disruptive ways?

I wonder if we found the treasure buried in a common clay pot. That’s an image the Apostle Paul uses: *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, common clay pots”* (II Corinthians 4:7).

If we dug up the kingdom treasure and found it in a simple clay pot, would we be nearly as excited as if it were in a jewel-encrusted chest?

For it is quite obvious the response encouraged is ‘all-in’.

The proper response is over-riding, overwhelming joy – like with the find of that pearl of surpassing value.

A response that involves your whole life, all of you, that gives of your whole self – like with the discovery of an unexpected treasure.

For this is the kingdom of heaven, for goodness sake! ... and for God’s ... and for yours, and mine.

You have to dig through a lot of dirt to find a buried treasure.

You have to sort through a lot of other enticing pearls to find the one of great value.

You may even have to rub elbows with a lot of smelly fish.

But who's to say who's a good smelly fish and who's a bad smelly fish?

The scope and scale and pull of this heavenly kingdom brings in all kinds of fish, the good, the bad and the ugly,

writes Jill Duffield.

The catch is not our concern. If we are blessed to recognize the present and coming kingdom of heaven, then our role is to respond by being all in with our whole selves. (“Looking into the Lectionary,” *The Presbyterian Outlook*)

For what we might call bad, God might call good.

What we call ‘bad’ fish may be the very good fish that God calls and uses and claims and works through.

What if that stinky fish we smell is the very yeasty one that God is using to grow the kingdom?

What if the fish we perceive as being ‘in the way’ is the very mustard seed through which God is inviting all peoples to come and commune, to flock together and to be embraced?

And when we wonder if that fishy person we rub elbows with is ‘good’ or ‘bad’, perhaps we would do well to remember the disciples...and then ourselves.

Remembering how they denied, abandoned, misunderstood.

And yet...they were part of God’s work/working.

Yes, the coming of the kingdom of heaven is good news.

The coming of the kingdom of heaven is also startling, disruptive news.

Good news that God is working even though we don’t see it, even all around us. As the hymn affirms, **“God is working God’s purpose out”** (Arthur Campbell Ainger, 1894).

Startling news that God comes in unexpected ways, even in unwanted ways; God works in unexpected people, even in unwanted people. And in its own way, that may be good news, too.

***HYMN** “As the Wind Song” GtG 292

**1. As the wind song through the trees,
as the stirring of the breeze,
so it is with the Spirit of God,
as the heart made strangely warm,
as the voice within the storm,
so it is with the Spirit of God.
Never seen, ever known
where this wind has blown
bringing life, bringing power
to the world,
as the dancing tongues of fire,
as the soul’s most deep desire,
so it is with the Spirit of God.**

(continued...)

**2. As the rainbow after rain,
as the hope that's born again,
so it is with the Spirit of God,
as the green in the spring,
as a kite on a string,
so it is with the Spirit of God,
making worlds that are new,
making peace come true,
bringing gifts, bringing love
to the world,
as the rising of the yeast,
as the wine at the feast,
so it is with the Spirit of God.**

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***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH** (from "*A Declaration of Faith*")

**We acknowledge one God alone,
whose demands on us are absolute,
whose help for us is sufficient.
That One is the Lord,
whom we worship, serve, and love.**

**We do not fully comprehend who God is or how he works.
God's reality far exceeds all our words can say.
The Lord's requirements are not always what we think is best.
The Lord's care for us is not always what we want.
God comes to us on his own terms
and is able to do far more than we ask or think.**

**We know that God is not confined to the story we can tell.
The story itself tells us God works his sovereign will
among all peoples of the earth.
We believe God works beyond our imagining
throughout the universe.**

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PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

(including moments for silent prayer)

THE EUCHARIST

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

Holy One,

receive our offerings as you receive our lives.

**We give out of the abundance of our hearts,
that the treasure of your kingdom may be
shared with many.**

**Enliven us with your breath and make your purposes known,
that our lives might show forth your glory;
for we pray in the name of Jesus
and by the power of your Spirit. Amen.**

SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

Invitation to the Lord's Table

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: **And also with you.**

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: **We lift them to the Lord.**

Leader: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

People: **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

(The prayer continues...)

The Lord's Prayer (Traditional)

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;

and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

**and the power, and the glory,
forever. Amen.**

Breaking of the Bread

Communion of the People

(Please hold the bread so that we might partake of it together, to remind us of our participation in this sacrament as a community. Please drink the cup as you are served, reminding us of our individual participation in this sacrament and our personal commitment to our Lord.)

Prayer

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “God, Whose Glory Reigns Eternal” [Tune 490]

**1. God, whose glory reigns eternal,
Spanning space as well as time,
Show us signs in seed and kernel –
Life potential, hope sublime.
Grant us insight, all discerning,
Seeing truth beyond bare fact,
Love translating all our learning
Into pow’r to be and act.**

**2. In Christ’s healing touch and teaching,
We see life as you intend,
Selfless love to others reaching,
Pain and brokenness to end.
And when hungry folk are nourished,
Filled by hope and word and bread,
These are signs your reign has flourished
And from bondage we are led.**

**3. Now we ponder life’s great myst’ry –
Suff’ring Savior, cross enthroned,
Past and future in one hist’ry –
Our mortality Christ owned.
And as resurrection’s glory
Shines into the empty tomb,
We too tell the ancient story,
Joy dispelling all the gloom.**

(next page...)

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

One: ...And let the gathered people of God say...
All: ...**Amen.**

POSTLUDE

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