



Pioneer Pastoral Charge
Sunday July 12, 2020
Disruptive Love

Rev. Helen Reed, Diaconal Minister

Candle Lighting: *The light of Christ... God around us,
among us, within us.*

Coming together

As we still ourselves to come to our God in worship,
we bring our hopes and fears,
our struggles and our lives as they are,
into the presence of the one
who leads us into a future
filled with possibilities.

God's word lights the path before us.

May this time of worship
empower us to make faithful choices.

God's word lights the paths before us.

May this time of worship renew and restore
our relationships with God and each other.

God's word lights the paths before us.

Come, let us worship

Hymn: ♪ MV#147 God, Help Us to Treasure

Scripture is our song for the journey, the living word
passed on from generation to generation to guide
and inspire. **God calls us to be doers of the word
and not hearers only.**

Matthew 13: 3-8, 18-23 The Voice

3 And so Jesus began to teach. On this day, He spoke in parables. Here is His first parable:

Once there was a sower who scattered seeds.

4 One day he walked in a field scattering seeds as he went. Some seeds fell beside a road, and a flock of birds came and ate all those seeds.

5 So the sower scattered seeds in a field, one with shallow soil and strewn with rocks. But the seeds grew quickly amid all the rocks, 6 without rooting themselves in the shallow soil. Their roots got tangled up in all the stones. The sun scorched these seeds, and they died.

7 And so the sower scattered seeds near a path, this one covered with thorny vines. The seeds fared no better there—the thorns choked them, and they died.

8 And so finally the sower scattered his seeds in a patch of good earth. At home in the good earth, the seeds grew and grew. Eventually the seeds bore fruit, and the fruit grew ripe and was harvested. The harvest was immense—30, 60, 100 times what was sown.

18 This is what the parable of the sower means. 19 It is about the kingdom of heaven.

When someone hears the story of the Kingdom and cannot understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away whatever goodness and holiness had been sown in the heart. This is like the seeds sown beside the road.

20-21 You know people who hear the word of God and receive it joyfully—but then, somehow, the word fails to take root in their hearts. It is temporary. As soon as there is trouble for those people, they trip: those people are the seeds strewn on the rocky soil.

22 And you know people who hear the word, but it is choked inside them because they constantly worry and prefer the wealth and pleasures of the world: they prefer drunken dinner parties to prayer, power to piety, and riches to righteousness. Those people are like the seeds sown among thorns.

23 The people who hear the word and receive it and grow in it—those are like the seeds sown on good soil. They produce a bumper crop, 30 or 60 or 100 times what was sown.

Scripture opened, God invited: Prayer for Grace

Creator God, Wherever we are you offer us wisdom, strength and courage.

We are grateful for your persistence and dedication.
You sow strength

**And we react like rocks,
making it difficult for others
to experience good life.**

You sow compassion
**and we react like thorny weeds
keeping people away from us
smothering their needs to feed our own.**

You sow courage
**and we allow others to peck away at it
until we are afraid of growing.**

We know that there are many opportunities
for us to welcome your gifts
and we are afraid that, by doing so,
we will be vulnerable
we will lose our perceived privilege
we will give up power.

**Forgive us God.
Mold us into welcoming soil,
Create in us a fertile ground for
strength, compassion, courage
to bring forth the fruit of love.
Open our hearts and eyes
to your voice in the stories we hear today
and may we see possibilities in them
for our justice giving decisions of tomorrow.**

Words of assurance.

God is the sower, and season after season
continues to offer us the gifts of the spirit.
God is persistent,
working with us to remove our thorns,

teaching us to repel those who would peck away at our faith,
reminding us that,
instead of using our strength to keep others away,
we could use it to keep others safe.
God works with us to create fertile souls
ready to live the gift of love.

Thanks be to God!

Last week the Hebrew Scripture readings introduced us to Rebekah. She offered hospitality to a stranger and God took her away from what was familiar to a new place of family and faith. Today, we learn that it took a while for Isaac and Rebekah to have their family and when they did, it wasn't a smooth, easy process.

Genesis 25:20-34 Common English Bible (CEB)

Jacob and Esau are born

20 Isaac was 40 years old when he married Rebekah the daughter of Bethuel the Aramean and the sister of Laban the Aramean, from Paddan-aram. 21 Isaac prayed to the Lord for his wife, since she was unable to have children. The Lord was moved by his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 But the children pushed against each other inside of her, and she said, "If this is what it's like, why did it happen to me?"

So she went to ask the Lord. 23 And the Lord said to her,

“Two nations are in your womb;
two different peoples will emerge from your body.
One people will be stronger than the other;
the older will serve the younger.”

24 When she reached the end of her pregnancy, she discovered that she had twin boys. 25 The first came out red all over, clothed with hair, and she named him Esau. 26 Immediately afterward, his brother came out gripping Esau’s heel, and she named him Jacob. Isaac was 60 years old when they were born.

Jacob acquires the oldest son’s rights

27 When the young men grew up, Esau became an outdoorsman who knew how to hunt, and Jacob became a quiet man who stayed at home. 28 Isaac loved Esau because he enjoyed eating game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

29 Once when Jacob was boiling stew, Esau came in from the field hungry 30 and said to Jacob, “I’m starving! Let me devour some of this red stuff.” That’s why his name is Edom.

31 Jacob said, “Sell me your birthright today.”

32 Esau said, “Since I’m going to die anyway, what good is my birthright to me?”

33 Jacob said, “Give me your word today.” And he did. He sold his birthright to Jacob. 34 So Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew. He ate, drank, got up, and left, showing just how little he thought of his birthright.

Message/Reflection:

Our readings for today seem unrelated to each other and yet, when we look at them asking the Question of “What would God have us do?” we might see a number of connections appearing. These scriptures are many generations apart and yet, in each one, the listener is asked to live with God’s plan, to be open to God’s way.

Isaac and Rebekah had created a home together, but they yearned for more. They wanted children. Have you ever heard “be careful what you wish for”? God provided them the children they asked for – but not meek and mild children. Children who would challenge their parents. Children who would be so different from each other that it would seem impossible to reconcile those differences. Children who would be self centred and greedy and whom God would identify as the leaders of different nations (foreshadowing the creative of the nations of Israel and Edom).

The passing of the birthright to the oldest son, was meant to ensure the continuing health and welfare of families and communities. Along with the receipt of the wealth came responsibility for all of the family members, staff, animals etc. Farms/holdings wouldn’t be split into unsustainable, smaller pieces. It was about much more than the money, but it seems as though Esau didn’t value that responsibility and Jacob was jealous of the prestige.

If we were to read more about these characters we would learn that, instead of treating the twins equitably, Isaac and Rebekah took sides: each parent had a favourite and that favouritism probably enhanced the competition between the two boys. Instead of introducing the ideas of cooperation, of joining their skills and gifts together their rivalry was magnified to the point of no return.

I wonder if this was really what God was hoping for?

I wonder if God was hoping that Isaac and Rebekah could teach trusting in God to do the best, that they would teach their children ways of listening and learning together, of being honest with each other.

Our world is filled with people as different as Esau and Jacob. We have hunters and gatherers, construction workers, builders, providers, rough and tumble people who are needed in our world. We have dreamers and homemakers, engineers, creators, quiet people who hold us together and transform the basics of life into more.

Yet, we often get caught, as Esau and Jacob did, in greed and wanting more for ourselves. We withhold the care of someone else's needs until we get what we want. We strain against the restrictions that are meant to ensure healthy communities. We don't look at the big picture of working together.

I wonder if this was really what God was hoping for?

In the parable that we hear Jesus tell today, I think that we hear God hoping for more willingness to accept God's direction. I think that we hear God hoping that we will trust in God's time line, and listen to God's dream that will make us stronger and better together. In this parable we also see God's persistence. Generations after Isaac, Rebekah, Esau and Jacob show us the destructive power of jealousy, favouritism and self-centeredness, God is still sowing words of love.

Jesus tells us that God is aware that sometimes the words fall on deaf ears, that sometimes people just don't want to accept what is offered, that sometimes their attention span is short but unsustainable, that sometimes they are easily distracted and taken away.

But God continues to offer the seeds of hope and faith and justice and care and love because God knows that there are people who are willing to be the ground for those seeds to grow. Like a farmer who goes back to the fields each year and puts in new crop even after years of drought or weeds that didn't yield much, God comes around again and again offering teachings of friendship, of acceptance, of loving until we are ready to accept them.

These readings both show us ways in which God enters the world and disrupts it by challenging us to love in ways that we didn't expect, or by naming for

us that we are not living faithfully and asking us what will we do about it.

I wonder what God is hoping for?

Is God hoping that we will become aware of when we are acting like weeds, choking out the goodness of life by focussing on the prestige and the money dangling around us? Is God hoping that we will stop being distracted by people appealing to us to think about ourselves and taking us away from loving each other? Is God asking us take care to nurture the roots of caring and justice so that we don't lose that important focus?

Is God asking us to be that place that accepts the teachings of looking after others, the teachings of ensuring others have what they need, the teachings of making space so that others can feel respected and cared for?

In our world that offers us so many opportunities to think of ourselves, we are beginning to notice that making decisions for everyone will benefit all of us. When we find ourselves in the position to teach compromise and cooperation, will we accept God's challenge to do that or step back and watch anger grow instead? The seeds of love are being tossed in our direction again and we have a choice to make – will we accept them – not knowing how they will grow, but accepting what God offers us. God

disrupts us often by asking us to love fiercely, to love strangers, to love each other.

I wonder what God is hoping for?

Offering Invitation

Through your gift of story, you offer us seeds to grow our souls. You ask us to make choices to sow seeds of love and care into your world.

As we hear your words today, may we respond with graciousness, compassion and humility creating your fruit of love in your waiting world. **Amen.**

Hymn: ♪ VU#503 When Seed Falls on Good Soil.

Communion²

From the Beginning,
followers of Christ have broken bread together.

Gathered at tables fancy and simple,
sharing wafers or full meals.

In this era of pandemic and separation
we continue to gather together;
sitting in our homes, with our own supplies,
we are linked together by our faith and God's spirit
that cannot be held back by walls, doors or evil.

The meal we share is hosted by
the God who meets us where we are.

Great Thanksgiving

May the Peace of Christ be with you.

Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to our God!

It is good to give God thanks and praise.

God you spoke Creation into being.
We give thanks for all that You have made.
For the waters from which life sprang forth,
for the wind that fills our lungs,
for the food that sustains our bodies,
for the fellow creatures with whom
we share the world.
We sing songs and shout
our praise and thanksgiving.

God you call us to live in you
and you choose to share our lives.
So we share with you
our fears and anxieties... we name our laments....
we dare to share our dreams and visions...
Trusting that you hear our prayers, trusting that in
love, you hold them and answer them.

God you meet us where we are,
be that in our churches, or in the fields,
or in the forest, or in our living rooms.
You speak to us constantly through many voices.
You remind us over and over again
that even when we are distanced from each other
we are not alone.
We thank you for all those voices
that have shared your love and promise
over the centuries: prophets and pastors,
men and women filled with your Spirit,
all those who remind us
of how you would have us live
within the world you have made.

Song of Creation: MV #203 (Tune VU#625)

O Holy, Holy, Holy God,

O God of time and space.

All earth and sea and sky above

bear witness to your grace.

Hosanna in the highest heav'n,

creation sings your praise.

And blessed is the One who comes

and bears your name always!

Remembering

As followers of Jesus,

the one we name as the Messiah

we remember his story.

Born of the young woman Mary,

raised in a backwater town,

he came to share your vision for the world.

He modelled your Kingdom,

lived by its values,

and in doing so enraged those with power.

Knowing what was to come,

he promised that we would not be left alone;

Then he was arrested, tried, convicted executed.

But the story was not over.

You, God of power in weakness,

you raised him from death

and he returned to breathe hope and life

into his fear-filled followers, into us.

As we gather for this meal

we remember a meal that

Jesus shared with his friends on the night before his death.

We remember that he took some bread,
blessed it, broke it, and passed it to them saying:

This is my body broken by and for the world.

When you eat this, remember me.

Later he took a cup of wine, blessed it, and passed
it to them saying:

This is the Cup of the New Covenant,

When you drink this, remember me.

And so, even all these years later,
we continue to eat and drink and remember,
sharing in the meal of faith.

And pledging, as we remember,
to follow the Way that Jesus laid out for us.

Invoking

Holy Spirit, you blow through closed doors
and into the places where we are.

You meet us in our homes and fill us with hope,
As we pause to remember today,
make us, while separate, unified in heart and hope.

In this bread and this cup
may we meet the Risen Christ.

In this meal of faith and transformation
may we feel the power of the Kingdom.

And once we have eaten may we be
unified in the common quest

to share the gifts You have given us.

Willing to offer what we have so that those dreams
and visions take shape in our world.

We pray in the name of the One, who breathes hope and peace into our fear, and who encouraged us to pray together as we sing

The Prayer of Jesus (VU960)

**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 them
that 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,
for ever and ever. Amen.**

God's Sharing

These are Gifts from God for the people of God.

Let us share together

The Bread of Life. **Thanks be to God.**

Cup of Blessing. **Thanks be to God.**

Prayer After the Meal

Even while we remain physically separated,
this shared meal unites us.

May this meal we share with each other
and with the whole Christian family
across the centuries and miles
change who we are.

In grateful response to God's abundant love,
may we bear in mind our integral connection
to the earth and one another.
May we remember that
the fullness of life includes
moments of unexpected inspiration and courage
experiences of beauty, truth, and goodness,
blessings of seed and harvest. **Amen.**

✠Blessing

Let us go out into God's world
having been welcomed around God's table.
As fertile grounds of love,
let us be the place where God's people
can plant their roots and grow to be all that God
needs them to be.
May the grace of Jesus the Christ, and the love of
God, and the strength of the Holy Spirit
be with all of us, today and always. **Amen.**

Changing the Christ Candle:

The light of Christ, shining into all the corners of the earth,
showing us where we are and where we are meant to be.
The Spirit of God. Breathe it in...and know that God is with us
wherever we go.

Hymn: ♪ MV#1 Let Us Build a House

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² Communion Liturgy: Rev. Gord Waldie, Grande Prairie, Alberta