

Order of Worship for February 12, 2023 8:30 AM

Prelude

P: The Lord be with you...

C: and also with you.

Opening Hymn: *"Listen, God is Calling"* – Hymn #833 (soloist)

Order of Confession and Forgiveness

P: In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

C: Amen.

P: The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him.

C: "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in Him."

P: Sin began in a seed of doubt, and doubts continue to be planted in our lives. Let us confess our sins to the Lord.

(Silence for meditation and self-examination.)

P: Most merciful God,

C: We confess to You with contrite hearts that we have sinned. Our thoughts, our words, our deeds condemn us. We have failed--and refused--to bring forth the fruit which You desire. We have failed to plant and water Your word. We have taken credit for growth that belongs only to You. For the sake of the innocent sufferings and death of Your beloved Son, Jesus Christ, we plead for mercy. Forgive our sins that we may be able to stand before Your judgment seat, as those who have pleased You.

P: The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; His mercies never come to an end. For the sake of Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven. Grow, then, as God gives you strength and opportunity.

C: Thanks be to God! Amen.

Service of the Word

Hymn of Praise: *"Alabaré"* - Hymn 799

P: The Lord be with you...

C: and also with you.

Prayer of the Day:

P: Let us pray. Merciful Father, Your kindness caused the seed of the Gospel to be planted in us. Extend Your mercy now, we pray, to all people of the world who do not have hope in Jesus Christ, that Your salvation may be known to them also and that all hearts would turn to You; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord.

C: Amen.

Old Testament lesson: Isaiah 55:10-13

R: “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall My word be that goes out from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Epistle lesson: 1 Corinthians 3:1-9

R: But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not being merely human?

What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labor. For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building.

R: This is the Word of the Lord.

C: Thanks be to God.

Sunday School Grades 2-5: “This Little Light of Mine”

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23

P: The Holy Gospel according to St. Matthew the 13th chapter:

C: Glory to You, O Lord.

P: And Jesus told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

“Hear then the parable of the sower: When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the

cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

P: This is the Gospel of the Lord.

C: Praise to You, O Christ.

Children’s Message (8:30)

Sermon Hymn: *“Your Kingdom, O Lord, Is My Glorious Treasure”* – **Hymn #654**

Sermon: *“Planting Seeds”* – **Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23**

In case you hadn’t heard, there’s a big football game tonight. And since it’s still one of the most watched television events, commercials are almost as big of a deal as the game. With attention divided by so many entertainment choices, the commercials attract interest almost as much as the game, and plant seeds to get people to buy the products.

Among all of the commercials for beer and chips and whatever the next new tech trend is, there will be commercials for Jesus. The He Gets Us campaign For the past 10 months, the “He Gets Us” ads have shown up on billboards, YouTube channels, and television screens—most recently during NFL playoff games—across the country, all spreading the message that Jesus understands the human condition.

The campaign is a project of “like-minded families who desire to see the Jesus of the Bible represented in today’s culture with the same relevance and impact He had 2000 years ago.” “You’re going to see it at the Super Bowl—‘He gets Us,’” said David Green, the billionaire co-founder of Hobby Lobby and one of the sponsors of the campaign. “We are wanting to say—we being a lot of people—that he gets us. He understands us. He loves who we hate. I think we have to let the public know and create a movement.”

Among despite the cost, advertising at the Super Bowl makes sense for “He Gets Us.” Organizers want to reach a mass audience that is paying attention. Super Bowl ads have become part of the pageantry of the big game. “There just aren’t ways to reach an attentive, engaged audience that size anymore,” said one advertising expert.

Is that how we think Jesus should have gone about spreading his message? After all, we hear Judas sing in the musical “Jesus Christ, Superstar” that “If you’d come today you could have reached a whole nation/ Israel in 4 BC had no mass communication.” Big, splashy efforts to try to get the word out about Jesus. That kind of thing seems like it should work well, but it doesn’t. Even evangelism experts will tell you that a broad marketing approach like that doesn’t work that well. Even organizations that market evangelism tools to churches note that things like direct mailers only bears at best a 2 % return rate. Instead, personal invitation is still the most prominent reason someone comes to church.

Maybe that’s what we should focus on as we hear the parable of the sower on a day we celebrate missions. Planting seeds not in a massive, industrial way, but instead planting seeds in a personal, individual way. That’s how Jesus did it; maybe that’s how we should do it.

This parable already seems strange to us, after all. We don't farm that way anymore. No one is going to just scatter seed all over the place. Farmers can now use the latest and greatest technology to pinpoint where each seed goes, making sure that each seed has the best chance to grow, that it's placed in good soil. Farmers then go around making sure that the soil is good, adding nitrogen or fertilizer or whatever else is needed to make it good soil, using herbicides to make sure there's no thorns or weeds rising up to choke out the good crops, using pesticides to keep the bugs away, and maybe even a scarecrow to keep the birds away. Even casual gardeners don't just toss seed wherever and hope for the best. They pick a spot in their yard with the right amount of shade, clear away the grass, and try to find ways to keep the rabbits and deer out of the plants.

But maybe we shouldn't think we know more about planting seeds than Jesus. Maybe we should instead remember how the sower plants the seed. The sower scatters seed everywhere, without caring where it lands, without preparing the soil. The sower doesn't seem to care that some of the seed is wasted, doesn't grow up enough to bear fruit.

As Jesus is speaking this parable, this is how his own ministry is going. Jesus is preaching and teaching and healing and attracting crowds, to be sure. But it's not that successful. Some follow, only to turn away when things get hard. Some follow, but get pressured to go away. Some, like the Pharisees, hear Jesus' word, but still don't believe Jesus is who He says He is. But some hear his message, know they can't go anywhere else to hear the words of eternal life, and share the message with those they meet.

But when we look at this parable, we can find the interpretation fairly easily. The seed is the Word of God. The seed is sown when people hear God's word. As the Word takes root in someone's heart, it grows. The growth happens automatically. It happens because of God's work. God makes the seed grow. God makes the kingdom of God come. That's why Luther says in the Small Catechism, "The kingdom of God certainly comes *by itself* without our prayer, but we pray...that it may come among us also."

We don't convert people—God does that. He takes care of the growing and maturing of faith. But God uses us to scatter the seed. As Jesus says to his disciples in the Gospel of John, "For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Or as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth" (1 Corinthians 3:6).

Jesus is the Sower who doesn't worry about crop yields because he trusts God's promise that the Word of God always yields a return. For as God spoke through Isaiah the prophet:

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways, declares the LORD.... For as the rain and snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it" (Isa. 55:8, 10-11).

God's Word does not return to him empty. It accomplishes his purpose. Even the seed that falls on the road, in the rocks, and among the thorns does not return empty.

Jesus even describes his own ministry like a seed. "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Jesus would go to the cross to die for us. But like a seed that dies and becomes something greater, Jesus would be planted in the tomb and sprout out of the tomb the first Easter morning, so show us all that he had done for us, and what that had accomplished. He showed us that he was the first fruits of the harvest of eternal life that is to come.

What these parables tell us is that our work is to scatter the seeds of faith. It is God who makes things happen. The same God who planted the first seeds into the ground at creation, the same God who planted the seeds of faith through our parents and friends, or others, continues to make the seeds grow.

Many things in our world are automatic now. Common, repetitive tasks can be automated for more efficiency. You can have your bills paid automatically so you don't have to think about them, or remember when they are due; though you do still have to make sure you have enough money in your bank account. You can even have your church offering withdrawn automatically! Automatic things can be good because we don't have to think about them.

God's kingdom grows automatically. Christ will build his church. Nothing will get in the way of his growing kingdom. What we can do is ask so that we can be a part of it too, that God will allow us to participate in the blessings of his kingdom—the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. We ask God to let us serve the One who saves us and share in the abundant harvest. We ask God to help us sow the seed and gather the grain, and for God to work through us to sow the seed and gather the grain. And when God answers our prayers, he produces the growth. All we do is scatter the seed. We do know that God is in control of the growth. Plant the seeds. God will do the rest.

The Prayer for Mission to All People

P: Lord, we pray that You will open our eyes to see how we can witness to the many people You have gathered here in our community from all over the world. Give us the attitude of Abraham who welcomed strangers into his tent with the words:

C: "Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed." (Genesis 18:4-5)

P: We thank You for Your mercy which extends to all people, for You reach out to all the world with Your Kingdom as Jesus told us:

C: "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the Kingdom of God." (Luke 13:29)

P: Help us to see that the good news of Jesus is for all people and all cultures as Peter discovered when You sent him to Cornelius:

C: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accepts people from every nation who fear Him and do what is right." (Acts 10:34-35)

P: Help us to be a part of how You break down the barriers that divide us through the unifying message of Jesus:

C: “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all.” (Romans 10:12)

P: Give us the courage of the young Hebrew slave girl who pointed her sick master Naaman, general of the Syrian army, to Your prophet with the words:

C: “If only my master would see the prophet Elisha who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.” (2 Kings 5:3)

P: Grant us the patience and the understanding to try to understand the many people in our community who are from different countries and cultures, so that we have the attitude of St. Paul who said:

C: “I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings. (1 Corinthians 9:22-23)

(The pastor will continue with other petitions)

P: Make us thankful for the wonderful opportunities You give us to share our faith with people from all over the world so that we can join the hymn of praise:

C: “At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:10-11) Amen.

Hymn: “Greet the Rising Sun” – Hymn #871

The Lord’s Prayer:

The Closing Prayer:

ALL: Grant, O Lord, that the lips which have sung Your praise in the sanctuary may glorify You in the world, and that the tongues which have confessed Your name may ever speak the truth. Then we, with all whom You have made clean through this pure and holy sacrament, will recount Your mighty miracles, proclaiming them freely-- spreading Your word to the whole world: "You are the Lord forevermore!" In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Blessing: (Pastor)

C: Amen.

Closing Hymn: “Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast” – Hymn #577

Postlude:

Soloist-Jeff Balvanz

Guitar: Josiah Resner

