

Sunday, July 16, 2017
6th Sunday after Pentecost

Introduction

God's word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth vegetation. It is also like the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately. Our lives are like seeds sown in the earth. Even from what appears to be little, dormant, or dead, God promises a harvest. At the Lord's table we are fed with the bread of life, that we may bear fruit in the world.

PRELUDE

"The Peace of God"

Dan Locklair

***GATHERING SONG "Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty" vv. 1-3 ELW 533**

**Open now thy gates of beauty,
Zion, let me enter there,
where my soul in joyful duty
waits for God who answers prayer.
Oh, how blessed is this place,
filled with solace, light, and grace!**

**Gracious God, I come before thee;
come thou also unto me;
where we find thee and adore thee,
there a heav'n on earth must be.
To my heart, oh, enter thou,
let it be thy temple now!**

**Here thy praise is gladly chanted,
here thy seed is duly sown;
let my soul, where it is planted,
bring forth precious sheaves alone,
so that all I hear may be
fruitful unto life in me.**

***GREETING**

☞ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

☞ **And also with you.**

***CANTICLE OF PRAISE "Praise to You, O God of Mercy" ELW 208**

**Praise to you, O God of mercy:
thanks be to you forever!
Raising high the weak and lowly:
thanks be to you forever!**

**From of old you loved and sought us:
thanks be to you forever!**

**Truth and justice you have taught us:
thanks be to you forever!**

**Strong is your faithfulness,
strong is your love,
rememb'ring your covenant of life with us.**

**Praise to you, O God of mercy:
thanks be to you forever!
Raising high the weak and lowly:
thanks be to you forever!
Thanks be to you forever!**

***PRAYER OF THE DAY**

☞ *Almighty God,*

☞ **we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen!**

FIRST READING

Isaiah 55:10-13

God's word to Israel's exiles is as sure and effective as never-failing precipitation. Their return to the Holy Land in a new exodus is cheered on by singing mountains and by trees that clap their hands.

¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven,
and do not return there until they have watered the earth,
making it bring forth and sprout,

giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,
¹¹so 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 succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

¹²For you shall go out in joy,
and be led back in peace;
the mountains and the hills before you
shall burst into song,
and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.

¹³Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress;
instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle;
and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial,
for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

Reflection

This text is the end of a chapter that the Lutheran Bible titles "An Invitation to an Abundant Life." What do you think makes for an abundant life? What metaphor for this abundant life is used in verse 10? What is like abundant rain and snow watering the earth? (verse 11) What is God's purpose in sending out his word? How have you experienced the word of God accomplishing God's purpose? How is God's word like food or water? It's hard to imagine a more abundant life in nature than expressed in verse 13. Have you ever felt that your life is so abundant and joyful that all of nature must be rejoicing with you?

In my experience, times like this do not always come when everything is going smoothly (although they can), but they can come in times of difficulty. But somehow a feeling of gratitude for what I have and see around me turns what seemed like thorns turn out to be cypress (to use the metaphor in verse 13). God's grace and goodness sort of sneaks up on me and reminds me that God's love is indeed everlasting. How have you experienced God's love and grace this week?

Psalm 65:1-13

¹You are to be praised, O | God, in Zion;
to you shall vows | be fulfilled.

²**To you, the one | who answers prayer,
to you all | flesh shall come.**

³Our sins are strong- | er than we are,
but you blot out | our transgressions.

⁴**Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your | courts to dwell there!
They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness | of your temple.**

⁵Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of | our salvation,
O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans | far away.

⁶**You make firm the mountains | by your power;
you are girded a- | bout with might.**

⁷You still the roaring | of the seas,
the roaring of their waves, and the clamor | of the peoples.

⁸**Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your | marvelous signs;
you make the dawn and the dusk to | sing for joy.**

⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is | full of water.

You prepare the grain, for so you provide | for the earth.

¹⁰**You drench the furrows and smooth | out the ridges;
with heavy rain you soften the ground and | bless its increase.**

¹¹You crown the year | with your goodness,
and your paths over- | flow with plenty.

¹²**May the fields of the wilderness be | rich for grazing,
and the hills be | clothed with joy.**

¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak them- | selves with grain;
let them shout for | joy and sing.

Reflection

The title of this psalm in the Lutheran Bible is "Thanksgiving for Earth's Bounty." Why do we praise God? (verses 1-4) Sometimes all of creation seems chaotic. How is God involved in the chaos of the natural world? (verse 5-8) The roaring of the sea for an inland people (like the people of Judah and Israel) was threatening. How does God bring order through threatening times? I love the poetry of verse 8, which reminds me of the poetry in Isaiah 55. Sometimes reading Scripture helps me to see the beauty of creation. This psalm is also an answer to anyone who might agree that God created the world, but like a watchmaker, now has nothing to do with it. In fact, this psalm says God continues to create the world anew. How? (verses 9-13) God is like a gardener, continuing to bring forth blessings from the earth. Again, the psalmist shows how the creation responds to God's blessing. (verses 12-13) If God is the gardener, how do we who live in God's garden respond to the bounty and goodness of God's love? This psalm might even convince us that the Garden of Eden has not disappeared, but we glimpse its presence around us through God's continuing creation. What do you think?

SECOND READING

Romans 8:1-11

There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ. God sent Christ to accomplish what the law was unable to do: condemn sin and free us from its slavery. The Spirit now empowers proper actions and values in our lives and gives us the promise of resurrected life.

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Reflection

*I recently read a memoir written by the son of a woman who was dying of cancer, *The End of Your Life Book Club*, by Will Schwalbe. His Mom didn't want to necessarily talk about her cancer, or about dying, but she was a reader and they read books together. What really impressed me about this book (besides the long list of books they read in the two years she after she was diagnosed) was his Mom's continuous outlook of faith and thanksgiving. As I read this text from Romans, she exemplifies for me the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus." She set her mind on things, not of the flesh (which I think in her case would have been fear, anxiety, anger) but on things of the Spirit, which included hope, thankfulness, and joy in her family and the work she had done. Perhaps you know someone like this—we have people in our congregation that live out this life of the Spirit. Our text from Isaiah, and Psalm 65, illustrate the faith that there is "no condemnation" for those who believe in God, the Father of Jesus. One of the ways that we live this faith out in our lives is by sharing our lives with one another. How do you experience this life of the Spirit in your faith?*

*GOSPEL ACCLAMATION "Lord, Let My Heart Be Good Soil"

ELW 512

**Lord, let my heart be good soil,
open to the seed of your word.
Lord, let my heart be good soil,
where love can grow and peace is understood.**

*GOSPEL

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have

much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!”

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

Reflection

There are several different ways to read this parable. I think if you read it as a farmer or gardener about how to be a steward of the seed, you won't be very successful. Although even careful gardeners plant more seeds than will grow up into mature plants, and they uproot and discard the weak plants. Another useless way to read this is as though it is just about us—how can we make sure we are the “good soil.” Careful farmers plant only in good soil, as much as possible. And we want to be able to bring forth grain, right? But this isn't about us. The sower is not careful. In fact, think of the seeds that you see that are not planted by careful farmers. When I take a walk, the seeds of the trees I walk under are all over the place—on the sidewalk and in the street, in carefully tilled gardens, where they grow even when they're not wanted—even a maple tree can be a weed!—even in the cracks in the sidewalks and the gutters of houses. Nature plants flowers in odd places. That's how the word of God works too. Sometimes we don't even suspect we are planting it—we are like the birds scattering the seed around, or an insect pollinating flowers while just going about their business. Can we plan to be evangelists? I think so. But the sower in this parable just is a sower, not calculating or measuring, but being a sower. That's how Will Schwalbe's Mom was an evangelist, not by calculating, but by living in the joy of the Spirit, even when she was dying. If there is one theme in these texts today, it is that abundant life comes to us as a gift from God. How do you experience such abundance?

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Debbie Kunz

SERMON

Rev. Roger Lenander

HYMN OF THE DAY

“The Trees of the Field” (sing twice)

**You shall go out with joy
and be led forth with peace,
and the mountains and the hills
will break forth before you.
There'll be shouts of joy
and all the trees of the field
will clap, will clap their hands.**

**And all the trees of the field
will clap their hands.**

**The trees of the field
will clap their hands.
The trees of the field
will clap their hands,
while you go out with joy.**

***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!**

PRAYER SONG *"Lord, Listen to Your Children Praying"

**Lord, listen to your children praying,
Lord, send your Spirit in this place;
Lord, listen to your children praying,
send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace.**

***PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Called together in the Spirit's embrace, let us pray for the mending of God's world.

A brief silence.

Gracious God, we give thanks for your living word that goes out and does not return empty. Make your church a partner in accomplishing what you desire. Unite us in faith, witness, and mission. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

For land, creatures, and people suffering from drought, that gentle rain bring life and hope. For mountains, hills, and the trees of the field, that all creation clap for joy. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

For nations suffering the violence and hunger of war. For exiles and refugees. Lead them home in peace and bless them with your fullness. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

We pray for all the men and women of our armed forces, at home and abroad. We especially lift up to you, Jason Shields. Defend them day by day with your heavenly grace; strengthen them in their trials and temptations; give them courage to face the perils which beset them; and grant them a sense of your abiding presence wherever they may be. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

For victims and perpetrators of race-based crime. For all who suffer sorrow, illness, or injury *especially Jim, Lin, Kathy, Roberta, Robert, Bob, Bill, Dorothy, Chester, Terry, Linda, and Alva. We also pray for those we name before you aloud or silently in our hearts (pause for 10 seconds).* Bring them justice, healing, and new life by the power of your Spirit. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

For this congregation and its leaders; through our shared work, let your word prosper among us and bring life to the community beyond our doors. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In thanksgiving for all who have died recently, for strangers and dear ones who have blessed our lives and sparked our hope. Give comfort and confidence to all who mourn. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

All these things, and whatever else you see that we need, we entrust to your care through Christ our Lord.

Amen!

***SHARING OF THE PEACE**

☞ The peace of Christ be with you always.

☞ **And also with you!**

OFFERTORY

***"Seed, Scattered, and Sown"* (sung twice)**

**Seed, scattered and sown;
wheat, gathered and grown;
bread, broken and shared as one,
the Living Bread of God.
Vine, fruit of the land;
wine, work of our hands;
one cup that is shared by all;
the Living Cup,
the Living Bread of God.**

***OFFERTORY RESPONSE "Let the Vineyards Be Fruitful"**

ELW 182

**Let the vineyards be fruitful, Lord,
and fill to the brim our cup of blessing.
Gather a harvest from the seeds that were sown,
that we may be fed with the bread of life.
Gather the hopes and the dreams of all;
unite them with the prayers we offer now.
Grace our table with your presence,
and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.**

***OFFERING PRAYER**

P *Merciful God,*

G **you open wide your hand and satisfy the need of every living thing.
You have set this feast before us. Open our hands to receive it. Open
our hearts to embrace it. Open our lives to live it. We pray this
through Christ our Lord. Amen!**

***DIALOGUE**

P *The Lord be with you.*

G **And also with you.**

P *Lift up your hearts.*

G **We lift them to the Lord.**

P *Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.*

G **It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

***PREFACE**

P *It is indeed right, our duty and our joy, that we should at all times and in all
places give thanks and praise to you, almighty and merciful God, through
our Savior Jesus Christ; who on this day overcame death and the grave, and
by his glorious resurrection opened to us the way of everlasting life. And so,
with all the choirs of angels, with the church on earth and the hosts of
heaven, we praise your name and join their unending hymn:*

***HOLY, HOLY, HOLY**

**Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God of power and might,
heav'n and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest,
hosanna in the highest.**

***THANKSGIVING AT THE TABLE**

Ⓟ *In the night in which he was betrayed,
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

*Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,
and gave it for all to drink, saying:
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.
Do this for the remembrance of me.*

***LORD'S PRAYER**

Ⓞ **Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those
who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours,
now and forever. Amen!**

***INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

Ⓟ *Come, let us eat, for now the feast is spread. Our Lord's body let us take together.*

***BLESSING**

Ⓟ *The body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ strengthen you and keep you in his grace.*
Ⓞ **Amen!**

***PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

Ⓟ *Jesus Christ, host of this meal,*
Ⓞ **you have given us not only this bread and cup, but your very self, that we may feast on your great love. Filled again by these signs of your grace, may we hunger for your reign of justice, may we thirst for your way of peace, for you are Lord forevermore. Amen!**

***BENEDICTION**

P *May God, whose power working in us
can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine,
grant you the gifts of faith and hope.
Almighty God, Father, + Son, and Holy Spirit,
bless you now and forever.*

G **Amen!**

***SENDING SONG "Step By Step"**

**O God, you are my God,
and I will ever praise you.
O God, You are my God,
and I will ever praise you.
I will seek you in the morning,
and I will learn to walk in your ways,
and step by step you'll lead me,
and I will follow you all of my days. (repeat)**

(ending)

**and I will follow you all of my days,
and I will follow you all of my days,
and step by step you'll lead me,
and I will follow you all of my days.**

***DISMISSAL**

P *Go in peace. The Spirit sends us forth to serve.*

G **Thanks be to God!**