

***Time after Pentecost
Sunday July 12, 2020
Living Faith Lutheran Church***

GREETING

We gather today to give thanks and to worship our Father and Lord whom we love and who loves us all.

Amen.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Blessed be the holy Trinity, one God,
whose steadfast love is everlasting,
whose faithfulness endures from generation to generation.

Amen.

Trusting in the mercy of God, let us confess our sin.

Silence is kept for reflection.

Reconciling God,

**we confess that we do not trust your abundance,
and we deny your presence in our lives.**

**We place our hope in ourselves
and rely on our own efforts.**

We fail to believe that you provide enough for all.

We abuse your good creation for our own benefit.

**We fear difference and do not welcome others
as you have welcomed us.**

We sin in thought, word, and deed.

By your grace, forgive us;

through your love, renew us;

and in your Spirit, lead us;

so that we may live and serve you in newness of life. Amen.

Beloved of God,

by the radical abundance of divine mercy

we have peace with God through ✝ Christ Jesus,
through whom we have obtained grace upon grace.

Our sins are forgiven.

Let us live now in hope.

For hope does not disappoint,

because God's love has been poured into our hearts
through the Holy Spirit.

Amen

GATHERING HYMN #332 I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say

I heard the voice of Jesus say "Come unto me and rest,
lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast."
I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn and sad;
I found him in a resting place, and he has made me glad.

I heard the voice of Jesus say "Behold I freely give,
the living water thirsty one; stoop down and drink and live."
I came to Jesus and I drank of that life-giving stream;
my thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

I heard the voice of Jesus say, "I am this dark world's light;
look unto me, your morn shall rise, and our day be bright."
I looked to Jesus, and found in him my star, my sun;
and in that light of life I'll walk till trav'ling days are done.

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.**

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Everlasting God, the radiance of all faithful people, you brought the nations to the
brightness of your rising. Fill the world with your glory, and show yourself to all the world
through him who is the true light, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord, who lives
and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

WORD

First lesson: Isaiah 55:10-13

For as the rain and 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, 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 succeed in the thing for
which I sent it.

For 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. Instead 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.

The word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

Second lesson: Romans 8: 1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For 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, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For 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. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For 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, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But 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. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If 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. The word of the Lord, **thanks be to God.**

Holy Gospel: Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

*Response prior to reading: **Glory to you, O Lord***

*Response following reading: **Praise to you, O Christ***

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him and he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell upon the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them; other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

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 is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on 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 such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble and persecution arises on account of the word that person immediately falls away. As for what was sown among the 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. But 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.

The gospel of our Lord, **thanks be to God.**

Sermon

In preparation for today's sermon I was reading different sermons on this scripture and found a very interesting take by Pastor Steve Ely in the United States. He looked at the sowing of seeds, nurturing and reaping by making a comparison, to of all things, a Facebook game called, Farmville. "What is Farmville?" I sure didn't know what it was. Farmville is a real-time farm simulation game. The game allows members of Facebook to manage a virtual farm by planting, growing and harvesting virtual crops, trees, and livestock. Since its launch in June 2009, Farmville has become the most popular game application on Facebook, with over 75.2 million active users and over 18.1 million fans as of January 2010.

I know many of you are from the Prairies and perhaps you were farmers, knew farmers or are now gardeners. I actually lived on a farm East of Edmonton in the 50's. Didn't plant or reap but was in charge of the chickens and the eggs. Sort of planting and reaping. And watching out for losing my fingers!

Interesting in this time of Covid-19 how the one business that is booming is Garden stores and suppliers. Many of us have taken to planting fruits and vegetables along with flowers, shrubs and trees. Yards have never looked so good. Those people who do not have yards but play the game Farmville get some idea of what it is like to be involved in agriculture, the lifestyle and the marketplace.

Jesus could have been a fan of Farmville because He understood the world of agriculture! Farming surrounded him. If you study the culture of Galilee it is easy to discover that agriculture was the major industry of that time and place. Everywhere Jesus went He encountered farms and farmers as they grew and depended on figs, olives, and grains. So, it is no major surprise that in order to effectively communicate, Jesus developed much of the content of His teachings around agriculture themes! In fact, if you go back and look through His teachings, especially the parables, you see the Farmville theme running like a thread throughout each story. In all, He told 9 agriculture parables. He spoke of the Fig tree, picking grain on the Sabbath, the Mustard Seed, the Sower, the Tenants of the Vineyard, the Vine and the Branches, the Weeds in the Wheat, the Workers in the Vineyard and the Yeast.

These teachings of Jesus have profound applications for all of us. Today's focus is on the one parable that I think was Jesus' greatest agricultural teaching. Although this parable deals specifically with how a person responds to spiritual truth this

teaching has so many implications for every area of our lives. It addresses our home life, our relationships, our finances, our work ethic, and our spiritual walk. It is wide in its scope and deep in its reach into the fabric of our lives. You have heard this story since you were a child. It is the parable of the “Sower”.

The parable of the “Sower” can basically be broken down into three elements. It addresses sowing, reaping and soil. You cannot escape the laws of the farm!

One of the options in Facebook is that you can block certain applications. When you start to receive tree requests, tractor requests, get a life requests you can block those and move on. However, it's a sobering thought that you cannot operate outside the law of sowing and reaping! Seedtime and harvest affects everyone.

Even the ungodly who are not a part of God’s kingdom operates within the confines of seedtime and harvest. You cannot escape this natural and supernatural law. We are all living in Farmville!

Seed limits limit harvest. You may not control the timing of harvest, but you do control the amount of the harvest. The Bible very clearly teaches us in 2 Corinthians 9:6 that “Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”

In the Message it says it this way, “6-7Remember: A stingy planter gets a stingy crop; a lavish planter gets a lavish crop. I want each of you to take plenty of time to think it over, and make up your own mind what you will give. That will protect you against sob stories and arm-twisting. God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.”

Some of us limit our harvest by limiting our planting. We think that the concept of limited sowing only relates to money. We think that when we are told that God delights in a cheerful giver that He only sits up and takes notice when we dig into our pockets during offering time. I will tell you that He does take notice, but this principle applies to every area of our life.

We limit our harvest in relationships by how we sow into them! When we won’t allow anyone to get too close and we hold him or her at a distance. When we build up walls and barriers and defense mechanism we limit our harvest.

We do this at work when we only do what is expected. When we don’t go the extra mile, then we limit the harvest of promotion, testimony, and favour.

And of course we do this in our giving. We tightly clench our fist around our finances and then expect God to open the windows of heaven and we are bewildered by the drought!

God loves a cheerful giver. Think about that in terms of our relationships, work, and finances. God loves it when we give ourselves away cheerfully to friends. He responds when we cheerfully represent him to our employers. He loves it when we dig deep into our pockets so that He can fill them from His.

Stinginess makes life on the farm hard! This isn't so much about quantity of seed as it is the attitude towards the seed. We may only have a little to sow, but it is our willingness to sow that determines the amount of our harvest. The seed we sow is a photograph of our faith! If you are unwillingly or hesitant to sow then it reveals that you don't really trust God!

The outcome of the harvest is our responsibility. It is the old adage of you reap what you sow. The harvest is up to us, good or bad. What we sow we reap! In other words, the harvest is our responsibility – good or bad. Many people actually believe that they are excused or immune to this law. Therefore, they can do anything, say anything, act any way we want and never stop to think about what the harvest will be when it is all over! Turn on the TV and see so much of this type of thinking.

What a person plants, he will harvest. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God! —harvests a crop of weeds. All he'll have to show for his life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God's Spirit do the growth work in him, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.

We control what is harvested – what you sow you reap. Seed produces like kind. Have you ever planted a tomato seed and to your amazement corn grew instead? We get what we plant!

We can't sow anger and reap peace. We can't sow snarky words and get soft answers in return! We can't sow hate and reap love. We can't sow laziness and reap reward/promotion. We are all in the sowing business and we are also in the reaping business. We can assess what we are sowing by what we are reaping! Like always produces like! So, if we are in constant struggle financially, then we can guess how you are handling your seed. If we are constantly surrounded by drama and turmoil, then we can assess what you are sowing. Our crop reveals what we planted!

If everywhere we go people end up angry, mad, and fighting maybe the common denominator is the seed we are sowing. If no one likes us maybe the common denominator is the seed we are sowing. If we can't ever seem to get a promotion even though you have tried a dozen different jobs, then maybe it is the seed we are sowing. Our harvest won't change until our seed does! It may be time for a seed check!

Don't complain about our harvest unless we are ready to deal with our seed.

Do we sometimes ever feel like our seed is buried? That it is covered over and literally dumped on with fertilizer? Seed grows better when covered by fertilizer. Our natural instinct is to fight the fertilizer. Fertilizer is our friend! We need to join the fertilizer fan club! If it weren't for fertilizer we wouldn't grow!

It's funny how many people travel up the Fraser Valley or buy a house there and complain about the smell. It stinks. It smells. It is nasty. Uncomfortable! But the fertilizer doesn't inhibit growth it forces and assists in growth.

The painful areas of our lives are not wasted: they are fertilizer! See it for what it is! All those trials and tribulations we are going through, have gone through and will go through is simply helping our seed mature and multiple! The seed would be wasted and left exposed to birds, weeds, and sun if it wasn't buried!

Don't fight the fertilizer, but we do need to recognize the fertilizer will fight you – resistance is necessary for growth – the chicken has to fight its way out of the egg – seed has to fight its way out of the soil! We need resistance – we need someone to sit us down for a while when we would rather have the spotlight. We need someone to keep us from following our dream for a while because if we reached it now we would waste it. We need someone to hold us accountable! We need someone to ask us hard questions! An unresisted life is a shallow life! It is called resistance training . . . without resistance you don't grow. Resistance produces growth and strength. So breathe deep!!!! That smell you smell is the smell of growth!

So, in the here and now, what does this mean for us? It means we have to examine our own life and determine if we are trying to live outside of the laws of the farm. If so, we need to recognize that this isn't possible. There are laws and principles at work that you cannot escape or ignore. They govern our lives.

Some of us need to get rid of a stingy spirit in relationships, at work, and in giving of your time, talents, and treasures!

Some of us need to see our harvest slapping us in the face because it is revealing what we have been sowing. What are we reaping? What are we sowing? For some of us . . . our seed needs to change this morning.

Many of us just need to embrace the fertilizer. Quit fighting it. Quit avoiding it. Quit turning your nose up at it! It is necessary for growth!

We can sometimes think that if no one knows about our past, it's forgotten forever. Is it? We get God's forgiveness but that doesn't mean we continue in that behaviour. We replant and nurture the new seed.

Someone once said, "Sow a thought, reap an action. Sow an action, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow a character, reap a destiny." Seed multiplies into more seed. Some of us are still dealing with seed that we sowed years ago.

So, what about sowing the seeds of our Faith in our community?

Maybe what is required of us is the courage to keep sowing the seed of God's Kingdom. We look at the world today and unfortunately watch the news and think, "what's the use"? However, we can stand up for those too vulnerable to stand up for themselves. Why? Because the Parable of the Sower challenges us to **keep sowing. Why? Because God is going to win!**

While others raise eyebrows, we will speak out for the rights of our First Nations Community and the LGBTQ community. Why? Because the Parable of the Sower challenges us to **keep sowing. Why? Because God is going to win!**

While our legislators complain about the cost of education, we will work for better schools for our children. Why? Because the Parable of the Sower challenges us to **keep sowing. Why? Because God is going to win!**

While others look at climate change and say, it's too late to make a difference, we will recycle and reuse, and write our legislators to keep our air and water clean. Why? Because the Parable of the Sower challenges us to **keep sowing. Why? Because God is going to win!**

And when others say, "we have already tried that and it didn't work," we will persist in opening our arms to young and old, to rich and poor, to the widow, the

orphan and the stranger in our midst. Why? Because the Parable of the Sower challenges us to **keep sowing. Why? Because God is going to win!**

We who live for God's Kingdom don't live as those without hope. We live as the farmer who, casting the seed upon the ground, knows that the Giver of the Harvest will bring forth far more abundantly than all that we can hope for or imagine. We just need to take that step.

AMEN

Musical Reflection: Hymn #408. Come, Thou Almighty King

Come thou almighty King, help us thy name to sing;
Help us to praise; Father all glorious, o'er all victorious,
come and reign over us, Ancient of days.

Come thou incarnate Word, merciful, mighty Lord.
Our prayer attend. Come and thy people bless,
and give thy word success, and let thy righteousness on us descend.

Come holy Comforter, thy sacred witness bear,
in this glad hour! Thou who almighty art, rule now in every heart,
never from us depart, Spirit of pow'r.

To thee, great One in Three, eternal praises be,
hence evermore! Thy sov'reign majesty may we glory see
and to eternity love and adore.

Peace

May the peace of Christ be with you all. **And also with you.**

Prayers of Intercession

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

A brief silence is observed.

Gracious God, your word has been sown in many ways and places. We pray for newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to sustainably use what you have given. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Abiding God, care for all who are in need. For those who are doubting, renew faith. For those who are worrying, provide release and instill courage. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. Allow the words of informed health authorities to enter the hearts of the fearful and provide rest and assurance. Strengthen us to rise above the crippling fear that envelopes our world and to act boldly in our faith. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Renewing God, revive your church in this place. Nourish and nurture the seeds you have planted. Restore our ability to act boldly in our faith. Replace what has been depleted. Sustain us as we look to find ways to deepen relationships with the wider community. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died. Comfort us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

HYMN OF THE DAY #574 Here I Am, Lord

"I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.

All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save.

I, who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?"

Refrain

Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you calling in the night.
I will go Lord, if you lead me, I will hold your people in my heart.

“I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people’s pain.
I have wept for love of them, they turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone,
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?”

Refrain

“I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them, my hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide, till their hearts are satisfied.
I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?”

Refrain

Lord’s Prayer

Blessing and dismissal

God’s word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth new life. 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 us a harvest. Send us out, O Lord, to be your fruit to the world. **Amen.**

SENDING HYMN #840 Now Thank We All Our God

Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,
who wondrous things has done, in whom this world rejoices;
who, from our mothers’ arms, has blest us on our way
with countless gifts of love, and still is ours today.

Oh, may this bounteous God through all our life be near us,
with ever joyful hearts and blessed peace to cheer us,
and keep us all in grace, and guide us when perplexed,
and free us from all harm in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God the Father now be given,
the Son and Spirit blest, who reign in highest heaven,
the one eternal God, whom earth and heav’n adore;
for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore.