

WALNUT HILL CHURCH
RESOURCES FOR HOME WORSHIP AND STUDY
SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020
THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

In the pages that follow you will find **four** resources. Please adapt and use them as might be helpful for yourself and/or your household...

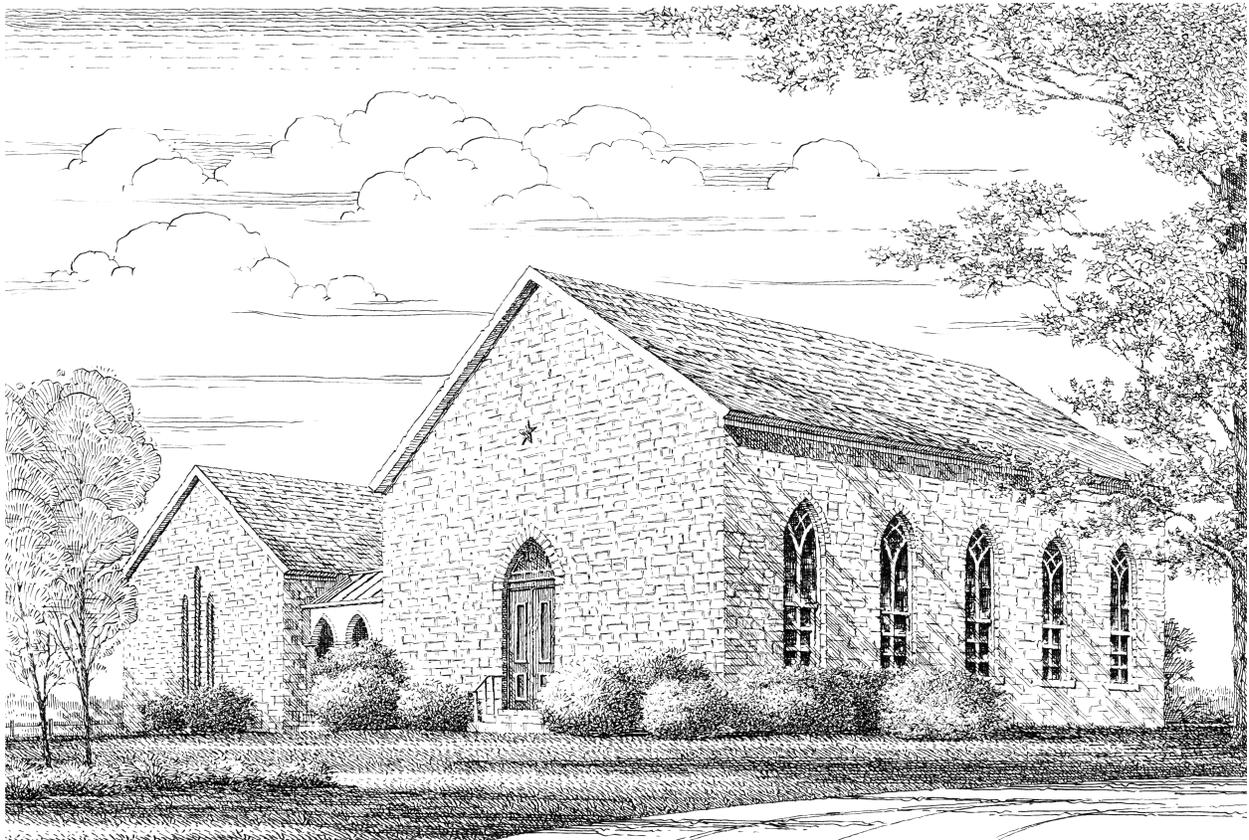
...the **Order of Service** being used for the in-person and Facebook worship

...a transcript of the sermon for Sunday, July 12, *The Sower*

...the July 12 edition of *Walking Through Scripture* lectionary reading guide

...**Ideas for Families** including **Children's Bible Story** and **Youth Conversation Guide**

If you do not have a Bible handy, you can visit www.bible.oremus.org and search the lessons in question.



MORNING WORSHIP
SUNDAY JULY 12, 2020, 11AM

GREETINGS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

PRELUDE

SENTENCES & PRAYER

God said: Let there be light, and there was light.

And God saw that the light was good.

This is the day the Lord has made;

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Praise the Lord.

The Lord's name be praised.

New every morning is your love, great God of light, and all day long you are working for good in the world. Stir up in us a desire to serve you by serving others, to live peacefully with our neighbors, and to devote each day to following your servant, Jesus, in whose name we pray. *Amen.*

SONG

A BODY PRAYER inspired by Julian of Norwich (source: The Plural Guild)

***Await** God's presence

- *hands in front, waist high, palms up*

***Allow** a sense of God's presence

- *hands outstretched above the head*

***Accept** whatever comes as a gift

- *hands together over the heart*

***Attend** to your calling to spread love in the world

- *hands spread in front, waist high, palms up*

(You may visit the Walnut Hill website, www.walnuthillchurchky.org, "Sermons" page for a recorded scripture, sermon, and prayer for the day.)

SCRIPTURE - Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that 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 on 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; 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 brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!’

HOMILY

PRAYERS

Gracious God: You sow love in this world so generously that some reckon your love to be wasteful. Nonetheless you sow, hopeful and trusting that love will find good ground in the hearts and minds of women and men where it will yield abundantly.

Thus we pray for the seeds of your love and the soils upon which they are spread...
...in this day, which we have been given to live,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

...in the companionship of family and friends,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

...in acts of kindness between neighbors and strangers,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

...in words and deeds on behalf of the oppressed,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

...in care for those affected by the coronavirus,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

...in faithful stewardship of the Earth and its resources,

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord.

May your love yield abundantly, O Lord, in our hearts, our lives, our church, our city, our nation, and our world, through Christ, who taught us to pray saying,

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. Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

SONG

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

THE SOWER
MATTHEW 13:1-9
JULY 12, 2020
MICHAEL L. WARD

Among the various attributes of God that have been identified, categorized, and theologized over the centuries, I would like to add one more this morning, a divine attribute we might not have learned in the Sunday School, catechism, or confirmation classes of our youth. To put it simply, along with omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, and the rest, we might also say that God is not afraid of failure. Well, of course not. God never fails. Are we sure about that?

If the “Parable of the Sower” presents an authentic picture of God, even if only a snapshot, then God fails plenty often, three out of four times, so the story has it. A sower went out to sow seeds. Some of the seeds fell on the hard path and were carried away by birds. Some of the seeds fell on the rocky soil and burned up in the mid-day sun. Some of the seeds fell among the weeds and were choked out before the plants could get a good start. While some of these seeds possibly took root and sprouted, none of them bore fruit, which was (is) the purpose of sowing. Only the seeds that fell in the deep soil took root and bore fruit. Three out of four did not. Three out of four attempts failed.

Parables are not intended to be systematic presentations of God’s being, attributes, etc. That said, I am nonetheless impressed and surprised by Jesus’ willingness to portray the divine sower in such a potentially unflattering way, not being a very efficient sower of seeds. Or maybe that is simply the nature of the work when it comes to sowing seeds of the Kingdom of God, a lot can affect the outcome between the planting and the harvest.

God, it seems, is extravagant, even wasteful, when it comes to sowing seeds of the Kingdom, seeds of divine love in the world, in our lives, knowing full well that most of what is sown will bear no fruit whatsoever. Yet, the Sower goes on sowing just the same, in the hope that some of the seed, even if just a fraction, will find good ground somewhere in this world, somewhere in your life or mine, because the Sower knows that whenever the seed finds good ground, “WATCH OUT!” The results are remarkable, even beyond imagination, one hundred, sixty, thirty-fold. Keep in mind this parable was told to an audience, including subsistence farmers, for whom a ten-fold yield was probably beyond what any of them had ever seen, even in the best of seasons. “Let the one who has ears, hear.”

Jesus said, his way of making us aware that something important had just been spoken.

I wonder how much seed has been cast into this world by God, from the evolving creation of life in all its wonder, diversity and abundance, to the countless men and women over the millennia who have spoken and demonstrated God's love to their families, to their neighbors, to the entire world? No doubt many, if not most, of those seeds have been carried away, scorched, or choked out, intentionally or unintentionally, before they could bear any fruit. Yet, despite myriad failures, the seeds kept, and keep, coming.

Even, perhaps especially, in these days of coronavirus and racial tensions the seeds keep coming. In the midst of all the bad news regarding the virus, we have seen many examples of people who have put themselves at risk, or who have offered their time and resources sacrificially, to care for and help persons affected by Covid-19. Similarly, in the midst of all the strident rhetoric around race have been those persons pointing to genuinely new ways for people to live together in mutual respect and shared justice. Thank God for those who serve as spreaders of divine love in places and situations where most seeds have little chance of growth. Maybe one of them will take root in another person's heart and life, or lead to a community bearing remarkable fruit.

We do not have to go far to be reminded of the extravagance, even the wastefulness, of the divine Sower. Our own lives provide ample opportunity. Scan your memory for those persons and circumstances that you can identify as seeds of divine love cast into your life. Many of them we just were not ready to receive, so they never took root, or they were choked out by competing influences, concerns, interests. We might remember them now wistfully or with regret. Add to these the countless seeds that we did not even notice, much less remember. We begin to appreciate how inefficient this business of God's love can be. Yet, the seeds kept coming in the form of people, circumstances, even intuitions. A precious few of them took root. Our lives were changed and are still changing. Thank God the Sower was willing to fail so many times with us that we might still have opportunity to bear much fruit while we live.

This parable presents God as the Sower, with the world and those in it as the soil receiving the seeds of divine love. That said, we know that the Sower uses all sorts of spreaders to broadcast the seed, not the least of which, we hope, is the church. With that in mind, the church (collectively and individually) needs to be mindful that much, if not most, of the seed God spreads through us will not bear

fruit, at least not that we can see. This is a reality that can be hard, discouraging, but hopefully it will not prevent us from doing the work generously, even dare I say wastefully, not afraid to fail. This is where I become concerned when I hear an effort to spread God's love evaluated based on its "results." No doubt the church should do its best to cast seeds effectively, but also extravagantly, maybe by some estimates even wastefully, on the hope that a small fraction will bear fruit, remarkable fruit, in some unlikely soil. If a word is spoken, if a deed is done, if an effort is made that bears no fruit we can see, let us not become discouraged by it, even less embittered toward the soil, for such is the nature of sowing, at least as God goes about sowing love. Instead, let us sow always in the hope that one seed out of four, or even one seed out of million, will bear fruit, for when it does, the harvest will be beyond our imagination.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

WALKING THROUGH SCRIPTURE
SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020
“A FAMILY CAUGHT IN DYSFUNCTION”

Lessons

Genesis 25:19-34

Psalms 119:105-112

Romans 8:1-11

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Introduction

This week's *walk through scripture* finds us again in the ma/patriarchal narratives, in this case the narratives related to Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 25-28). Isaac and Rebekah provide something of a bridge between the long and more involved stories of Abraham and Jacob. Key in all the narratives is the ongoing promise to Abraham and how God will further the promise till the next generation. If the tension for Abraham/Sarah concerned whether or not there would be an heir to carry the promise, the tension for Isaac/Rebekah concerns which (of twins) heir would carry the promise. Behind this story is the tradition of primogeniture, that is the tradition of the first-born carrying the primary legacy of the family. The tradition would suggest that Esau (as the first born by a matter of moments) should carry the promise, but God, or Jacob, had other plans.

Commentary

Much is made by some Christians regarding the importance of “family values,” often identified as “biblical values.” Truth be told, the Bible is mostly lacking in examples of the values that some of its advocates claim to promote. From beginning to end, the narratives of the patriarchs/matriarchs reveal individuals who fail to live up to “traditional” standards of decency and families caught in all sorts of dysfunction. In the case of this week's lesson (Gen 25), we observe siblings whose competition began before birth, and continued throughout their lives. Their sibling rivalry was abetted by parents who took sides and/or were in denial regarding their sons.

As to the brothers, they both had significant flaws. Esau seemed preoccupied with immediate sensation and satisfaction, so much so that he could not weigh the relative value of a wild game stew versus the inheritance that was his right as the first born. For his part, Jacob never met a “deal” he didn't like, even at the cost of any possible relationship with his brother. Neither one of these two commend themselves to us as role models. The storyteller's interest, of course, is

the “promise” made to Abraham years before, and God’s ability to further the promise through, and in spite of, the characters with whom he had to work.

The conventional interpretation of all this is the good news of God’s ability to use even the imperfect among us, which includes everyone. In addition, I might hope that the family values crowd would accept the reality that there is no perfect family, then or now, show a little more humility regarding themselves, and a little more grace regarding others.

As you read this week’s (July 12) lessons...

...reflect upon your own experience of family and where some grace might be needed in your family. (Gen 25)

...what might the psalmist mean when writing, “I hold my life in my hand continually...”? (Ps 119)

...Paul writes that “the Spirit of God dwells in you.” Do you sense the Spirit dwelling in you? (Rom 8)

...the Sower spreads seeds of the Kingdom widely, even wastefully. How are those seeds spread? (Matt 13)

Enjoy your walk this week!

IDEAS FOR FAMILIES **SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2020**

Background

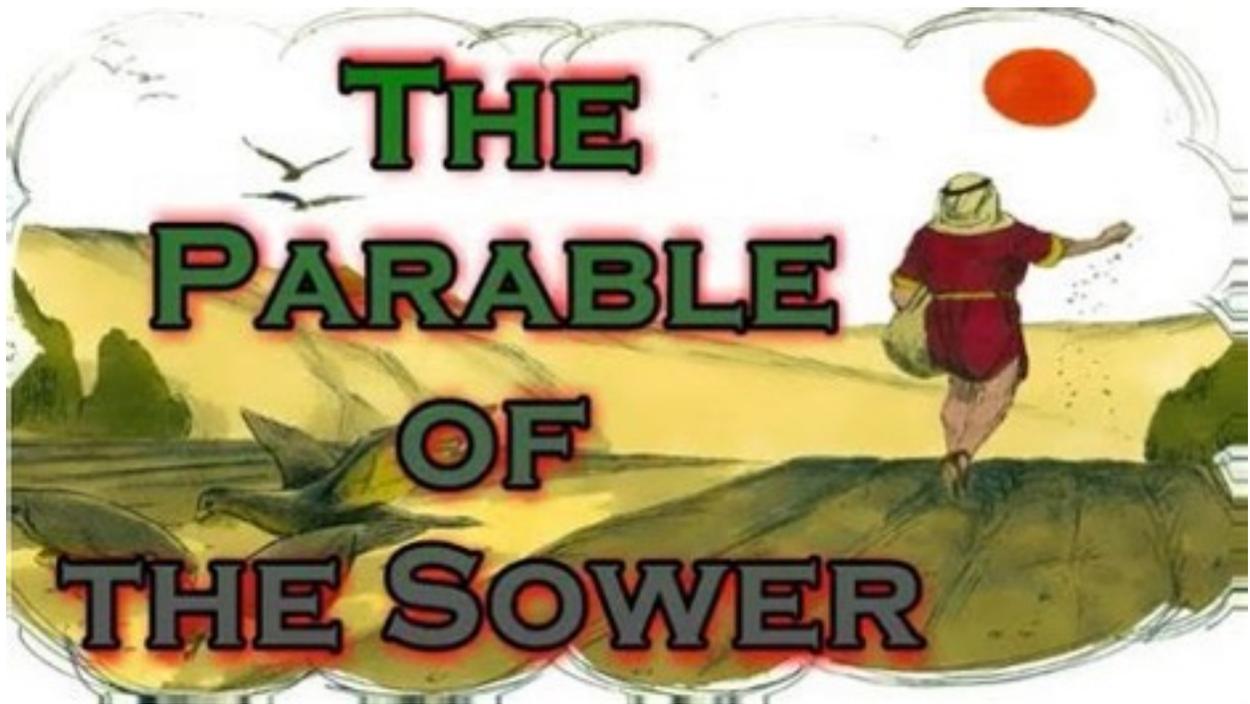
This week's lessons include one of the most well-known parables of Jesus, namely the "Parable of the Sower." The lesson from Matthew 13 includes the parable itself (vs 1-9) as well as a supposed interpretation by Jesus (vs. 18-23). Parables can be thought of as stories intended to provide fresh, and sometimes unsettling, glimpses of God's presence in the world. They are not the same as fables (stories with moral lessons) or allegories (stories in which the characters represent specific truths). Rather, they are often enigmatic as to their specific meanings and sometimes subversive regarding conventional thought. They are better approached with imagination than with analysis. In the case of the Parable of the Sower and its interpretation, it is quite possible, if not likely, that the interpretation represents a later voice than Jesus trying to offer a definitive interpretation of what is a rather open-ended story. Though it is difficult because of our familiarity with the interpretation, we do well to allow the parable to stand on its own, and approach it with a "holy imagination" regarding what it might offer regarding God's presence in the world. With that in mind, we will focus only on the parable itself.

The Text - Matthew 13:1-9

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the lake. Such great crowds gathered around him that 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 on 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; 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 brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!'

For Younger Children...

- *Share the story with the children (a simplified/illustrated version is found below).
- *Have some conversation around the question: "How do we spread the seeds of God's love...at home...at church...at school...in our neighborhood?" See if you can identify one, simple idea, that you could actually do.
- *Invite the children to some sidewalk chalk art (or paper/marker art) illustrating the story or their ideas about spreading the seeds of God's love.



Jesus told stories to help people understand how God acts in the world.

Those stories are called parables,
and one of those parables is...

“The Parable of the Sower”



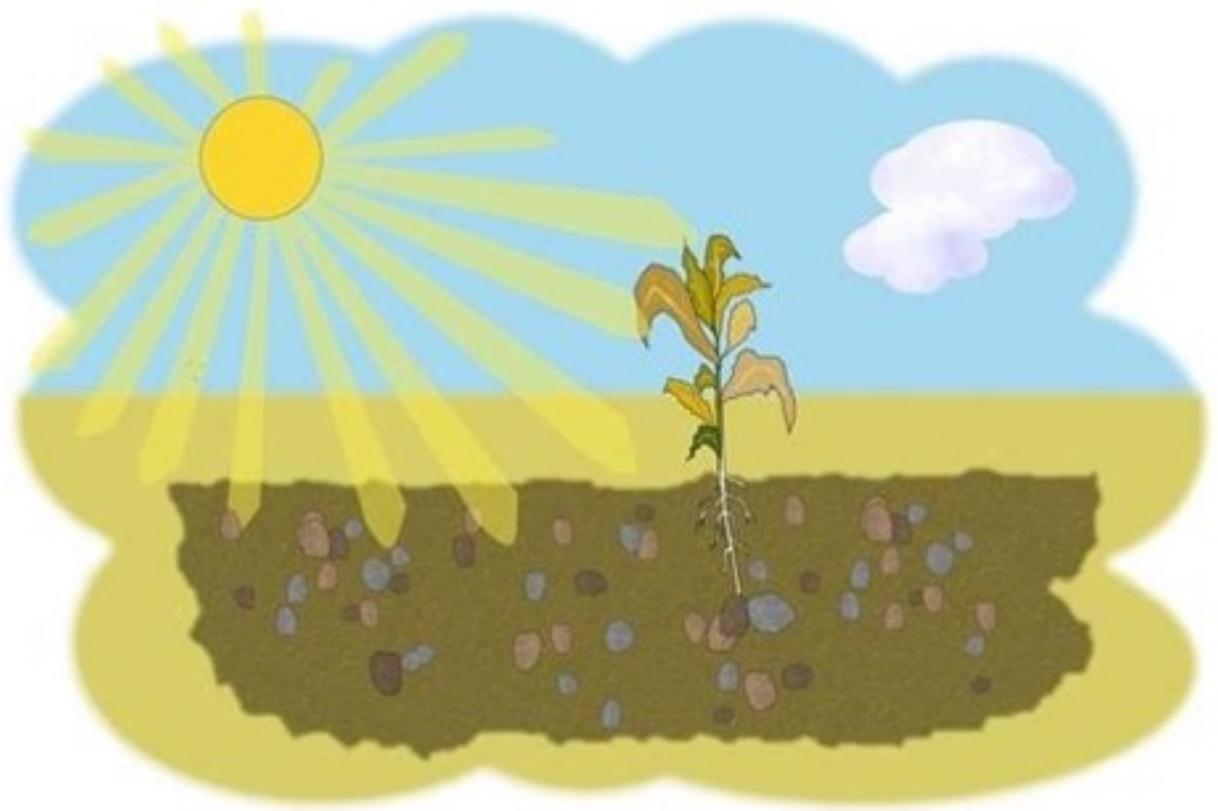
One day a farmer went out to spread seeds in the garden.

Spreading seeds is sometimes called “sowing”

The farmer spread seeds in all kinds of soil.



Some of the seeds fell along the road,
and the birds came and ate them.



Some of the seeds fell on rocky ground, and they wilted in the sun.

Other seeds fell among weeds, and they could not grow.



But some of the seeds fell on good soil,
and they sprouted and grew a big crop.



Jesus said,

God is like a farmer who spreads seeds of love
all over the world.

Prepare your hearts to be good soil in which
God's love can grow.



God's love can sprout and grow in our hearts.



Then we can share God's love with others,
and God's love can grow all over the earth.

How might you spread the seeds of God's
love...

...in your home?

...in your neighborhood?

...in your school?

...in your town?

For Youth

*Talk with the youth regarding the nature of parables “as stories intended to provide fresh, and sometimes unsettling, glimpses of God’s presence in the world,” acknowledging that they have many possible interpretations (see Introduction above).

*Invite the youth to read the story aloud. You may want to use both the traditional Revised Standard Version (see above) and the Message Bible version (see below), which translates the story into contemporary language.

*Some questions for conversation (As always, the conversation is more important than the particular answers to these questions.):

-The lesson describes large crowds gathering around Jesus. What do you think it was about Jesus that caused large crowds to gather around him?

-Why might Jesus have used “stories” to talk about God?

-What might Jesus have been trying to say about God through this story? Use your imagination.

-What do you make of Jesus’ follow-up question: “Are you listening to this? Really listening?” What might it mean to “really listen”?

Matthew 13:1-9 - The Parable of the Sower (*The Message*)

At about that same time Jesus left the house and sat on the beach. In no time at all a crowd gathered along the shoreline, forcing him to get into a boat. Using the boat as a pulpit, he addressed his congregation, telling stories.

“What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn’t put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

“Are you listening to this? Really listening?”