

July 12, 2020 –Sixth Sunday After Pentecost

A Blessed Sunday morning to you, and welcome to our nineteenth online worship service.

From February to July has felt like a very long stretch to me, and parish ministry during this time (which includes the period of COVID lockdown and then gradually re-opening) has been exhausting. Behind the scenes of regular parish life, working with the gifted lay leaders of our church to bring a congregational vote on missional redevelopment before the congregation, in late February, and then preparing for an AGM that did not happen as planned – all of these activities have been part of this time. This has been careful and rigorous work of communication and facilitation. It has taken integrity and much prayer to keep centering our work and our direction around the gospel, the good news of God's love, mercy and grace with us – and not surrender that focus to the secular realities and mores that gather around us in spades.

When we speak of danger, as Christians, I believe we should be speaking of spiritual danger with priority – for when eternal life is granted onto us (which it has been: it is done), mortal death should not be the danger we fear. So, for me, COVID anxieties has not been about death. My COVID anxieties have been about reformation: How do we reform our faith tradition, so that our spiritual lives remain strong and vibrant, growing and feeding ourselves and others – and especially how do we do this when we are not able to gather together as our tradition has always done: to sing, to share communion, and to be close together as any family should be.

I think many of us have entered this time of spiritual danger and found ourselves much safer, more grounded, closer to God than ever before. Many of you have shared with me your experience of greater and growing intimacy with God during this time. For others, the secular life has completely taken over, and concerns about keeping cash flow going in our homes and businesses, keeping customers satisfied, keeping families together and sane, ensuring we have a job to return to after COVID has been the more pressing focus. There is no judgment on how you have come to this time – because God's love remains constant, patient, present, waiting.

The beauty of God's love is that it waits for us. God waits for us, always, to come home.

I need to return to that nourishing bosom of God, I need to refill my soul so I have something good and nourishing to share when I return to you. Following these busy and unusual months of ministry, I find myself somewhat empty, very exhausted, spiritually depleted on this Sunday, and I know that taking leave to replenish was the right plan.

This week Wednesday I leave Cambridge for a little over two weeks of study leave, followed by a little less than two weeks of vacation. I will be working on preparing learning material for September during the study leave, and also on getting a pastor's blog up and running, as many have joined our community via online mechanisms during these months. Emergency pastoral care has been arranged during my leave period, and is accessible through the church office 519-653-4721 or by email secretary@st-peters-cambridge.org. I will not be available by email or telephone during the leave period, and I return to the parish ministry on August 13th, 2020.

Four Sundays of scripture meditations will be provided by some of gifted parishioners, generous and courageous to share their gifts: Bonnie Berg, Lorre Calder and (new member) Nicholas Stienberg. This past week we also welcomed, by special council vote three official members to our congregation – two whom you already know: Sharon Munro and Jean Leppannen, and one whom you are yet to meet Sarah Glinski. When I return, I will arrange for little affirmation of baptism ceremonies to welcome them into our body ceremonially ☺

While I am away, you remain in my heart and in my prayers. My beloved family in Jesus who every day teach me how to be a pastor. I love you very much.

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

Please take a few moments of silence, prepare your heart,
centre yourself for worship.

Prelude: Land acknowledgement with Brad's creative composition ☺

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9Zar8-GeUs>

Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with us all, in your home and in mine.

Prayer of the Day:

God of all nourishment, God who gives germination and growth – we are your gospel seeds. Within each one of us you have placed the seed of your truth: unending, abundant love, mercy and grace through your Son, Jesus. May we each, by your guidance and your strength which gives obedience, may we each experience germination, develop strong roots that connect us to you, and become the leaves, branches and fruit that beckon and host your coming Kingdom. Make us instruments of your will. Make us true disciples of Jesus. Amen.

The Reading: Romans 8:1-2, 5-11

With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death.

Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. And God isn't pleased at being ignored.

But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—you yourself experience life on God's terms. It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! [The Message Translation]

Word of God, word of life. **C: Thanks be to God.**

Reading homework: Isaiah 55 and Psalm 65

Acclamation of the Word: Mindful that it is not currently deemed safe to sing together, if you are accessing this at home, please consider turning up the volume and singing along – the words are included on the YouTube link.

Stay With Us Click here: <https://youtu.be/3FRT5B4xaPs>

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The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23.

C: Glory to you O Lord.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. 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!"

"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 or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately 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 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, [NRSV]

The Gospel of our Lord. ***C: Praise to you, O Christ.****

Meditation (Imagine Pastor Janaki's voice here):

Click here to hear Pastor Janaki: <https://youtu.be/iBWAs3zmYFQ>

In my first year of home ownership, I thought keeping a garden in Canada would be a delightful thing to do, so Canadian Tire and Home Hardware were the happy partners of an excited exchange of my money for seed packages. These seed packages came with expiry dates on them, and needless to say, I could not keep up with the mere tasks of lawn mowing and bush whacking, let alone prepare ground for seeds to go in and actually flourish, so these seeds took up residence in an old cookie tin.

Many a spring, I would go through the seed packages, and again visions of gardens dancing in my head, I would imagine my vegetable garden: neat rows of zucchinis and tomatoes and greens and beautiful colours of flowers.

It took COVID to give me the time to actually plant some of those seeds. The vegetables I started in small pots, which I set where I could see them from my study window. In the spring, I spent quite a bit of time hollering out that window at squirrels and chipmunks who I was quite sure raided my (now stale-dated) seeds.

I kept watering (when the spring rains didn't keep the soil visibly moist). I about abandoned the pots I had put zucchini seeds in because the rodents with good hair jobs had been in them so much. Plus I figured the seeds were stale dated and their germination period had passed, so I stopped paying attention to those pots altogether. And then, one day, I noticed leaves.

And more leaves.

And now there are plants in the ground, bearing big blooms and behaving quite promising. I talk to them daily and water when the rain is not forthcoming. And I hope soon to be able to bring produce as gifts when I come to visit ☺ It is said that the person who has to buy zucchini is a

person without friends who grow gardens ☺ For we know how bountiful zucchini plants can get when they are ready to bear!

The Gospel reading today always makes me think of gardening ... not just the abundance of seed throwing which the sower in the reading practices ... In fact I am not quite sure if even to call him a sower makes sense, he is more of a crazy spontaneous seed flinger in my humble estimation – this guy does not seem to do any preparation of the soil, does not seem to discern whether seed should or should not go anywhere, but simply seems to toss the seed around, much like the wind will do ... here, there, everywhere:

On the path.

On rocky ground.

On thorn patches.

And a blessed few on good soil – those good ones bearing bountifully.

But is it really “the good ones” that bear bountifully?

Or it is those who have the good fortune to land on good soil.

The seed is the same that lands everywhere.

But where the soil is good, roots find purchase and nourishment, to go deep and feed a plant that grows strong and bears bountifully. It is not about the seed at all it turns out ... it is about the soil, or the place where the seed lands.

In many of the parables, Jesus does not provide any explanation of the parable – much to the annoyance of some of our parishioners (you know who you are – Hi Barb Jones) ☺ But in this parable, Jesus gives an explanation of what he means ... giving us examples of places where the seed has failed to germinate or failed to flourish:

When the word of the kingdom is shared with anyone, and it is not understood at all, the evil one comes and snatched away what is sown in the heart. We may like to think of that evil one as a guy dressed in red or black, with a forked tail, a pitchfork and horns. Or we might think of that evil one as that which distracts us from focusing even a little bit on the word of God that is given to us, the good news of which we know. Maybe it is a deep love for “recreational shopping”, maybe it is a deep love for being in control, maybe it is a workaholic tendency, or an addiction to something like porn or alcohol or drugs. All these evil ones come and snatch away what is sown in the heart – leaving us empty though perhaps surrounded by stuff. Leaving us ever clawing after some goal we can never quite attain.

As for what is sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word immediately and receives it with joy – but has no root – so that the minute some hardship occurs, that person falls away from the Word, relying on their own abilities rather than God. I would say, this time of COVID has really taught me that my own abilities have very little to offer over God’s protection, presence and power. But at times I felt my branches go limp, as I tried to take charge again in a world that was busy changing all around me with lockdowns and closures, and news that herd immunity may not be a thing. I like the way St Paul tackles this in his letter to the Romans:

“Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God’s action in them find that God’s Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life.”

For what is thrown on 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. I would liken this to those of us who have become so preoccupied with the news channels that it is as though we are mainlining fear, we are taking in so much anxiety from the news and all the updates that go with it, that we can hardly find a peaceful place to say an honest prayer, to spend some moments to ground ourselves in God. I know for myself, about a week into COVID lockdown, I had to put strict limits on my news reading, in order to control that threat of all hope being choked out by fear.

But, for the seed sown on good soil, the Word is heard, and understood and bears fruit, and yields in plenty.

One thing I found very interesting on all the seed packets which I so lovingly caressed for so many years before actually planting them was that they all said, once the seeds were sprouted, separate them in the ground – give them room away from each other so they could bear well.

Likewise, when the gospel speaks of the seed sown on good soil, a yield is possible because there is space for the seed to grow in this good soil – there is no crowding out. In some ways the isolation of COVID, and not being able to meet as we usually would has given us space, it has given us room to grow in the way that is possible when we make an intimate and close space for ourselves with God - those of you who have given yourself time and space during COVID isolation and lockdown to be with God have experienced this blossoming. I have been privileged to witness it ☺

I don't think this gospel reading really requires a whole lot more unpacking – Jesus kind of covers it all for us in his post-parable idiot's guide to what this means ☺ But the thing Jesus does not speak about in his parable or his unpacking thereof is the work of preparing the soil. God is generous in sowing seeds, scattering the good news every which where.

God does not put good seed in some places and stale dated seed in others.

Perhaps we can take some responsibility for tilling the soil of our hearts and our lives, so that the seed we have received is able to germinate, take root, receive water, grow and bear good fruit.

Tilling the soil might look like removing some of the barriers for germination: take away some distractions, turn off the news, turn away from your desire to be in control of everything, be present to the word of God – pay attention.

Adding some fertilizer and water won't hurt: read the word of God, spend time in prayer, in nature, in silence, in meditation. Listen to worship music, sing along when it is safe to do so, lay in bed or sit in a relaxed way and allow Spirit to engage with you. Allow some tears to flow if they need to. Release some angers and resentments from your life – give them to God. Uproot some fears that threaten to choke God out – say to the darkness: I beg to differ. Be brave in turning away from some of the evils of the world that pose as harmless preoccupations.

This past week I had a delightful conversation with one very Spirit-filled parishioner, Mrs. Edie Miller ... and she described to me how the COVID lockdown time had been such a good interlude of quiet time with God ... she described this time as like the period of transformation when a caterpillar goes into the dormant chrysalis phase, soon to emerge a totally other creature: a butterfly.

It is a wondrous thing to see these zucchini plants, which began as stale dated seeds, worked over by rodents with good hair jobs ... to see the total transformation of these single seeds into big plants with huge bright blooms on them. It shows me that when the soil is right, and the time

is right, germination and fruitfulness is possible. Christ has arisen, and is able to rise in each one of us anew.

May that possibility take root, grow strong and bear fruit in the good soil of YOUR life in Jesus. Amen.

Hymn of the Day – # 364 Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia

Click here <https://youtu.be/ulcq4PNckAo>

Text: B. Kaymaanywa, H. S. Olson; Tune: Tanzanian Traditional

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Our prayers for this are from Heidi VanSchaik, our youth minister. They give focus to the things that have affected our younger brothers and sisters during these unprecedented times.

A Prayer In The Time Of COVID-19

God of love, you help us turn our worries into prayers. You hear the confusion, anxiety, uncertainty, and fear in our minds right now. We lift our burdens to you so that we can let them go, knowing you are here to listen. We pray for every young person who has lost their job & now faces financial struggles, for every university student who had to return home unexpectedly, for youth whose home is not a safe place, for everyone struggling with the transition to online school or lack of routine, for the graduating class who might not get to walk across the stage, and for all people who are missing their friends. Together we grieve all the lost joy and happy memories quarantine has taken from us.

Thank you, Lord, for the person on the other side of the screen (or page) right now. For their courage, strength, and kindness despite everything weighing on their hearts. Help them to know your boundless grace and endless love is still here even when they can't see it. We pray for doctors, nurses, janitors, cashiers, politicians, and everyone working at this time. We ask you to help us see Your face in all the brave people keeping our families and country together. Although buildings may be empty, we pray you keep our hearts full of compassion for others and love for our neighbours. We thank you for FaceTime, TikTok, Instagram challenges, and all the other things that remind us we are not alone in this.

Knowing God, you understand even the messiest of our prayers. Despite physical distance, we are still Your church. We pray for CLAY and the hundreds of young people disappointed that we can't come together this summer. We look forward to next summer.... We call you to be our lighthouse in the wavy seas and our guide in the wilderness. God, you've got some crazy plot with this whole Corona thing, but we trust you. The unknowns of Your plan have no end, but neither does your grace.

Amen.

Lord's Prayer:

Click here for our familiar sung version, with Brad on organ, and Helga singing:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKpchRaebQ>

Music by Swee Hong Lim

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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 those who 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, forever and ever. **AMEN.**

While you listen to the offertory hymn, continue your prayers and consider how you may be an offering in the coming week.

Offertory – #674 Let us Talents & Tongues Employ

Click here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ob1C_pZapPY

Text: Fred Kaan; Tune: Jamaican Folk Tune, adapt, Doreen Potter

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Offering Prayer

God of all abundance, receive our brokenness and the offering of our lives.

Take us, who return to you in thanksgiving: form us and shape us into a love like Jesus, so that we may be love for this broken world. **Amen.**

Sending Hymn: #396 Spirit of Gentleness

Click here: <https://youtu.be/Ww7lx8t7Ls0>

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Blessing:

May God bless us and keep us.

May the face of God shine upon us with grace and mercy.

May God look upon us with favor

and give us ✝ peace.

Amen.

Dismissal: Go in Peace, Go in Hope. ***Thanks be to God.***

A Small Note on our Neighbourhood:

This past week, we found out that a Cannabis store was seeking to open across the road from us on King Street. There had been an “illegal” store there last year. Upon Church Council’s instruction, we sought to issue an objection to the location of this store, so close to many schools, and in a neighbourhood where many vulnerable people reside. Unfortunately, the deadline for submission of objections on the government website had already passed. We will follow up to try and have our objections included with the objections from our neighbours who share our concerns about bringing more harmful substances into our neighbourhood.