

July 19, 2020 – Seventh Sunday After Pentecost

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

My notes this week to you will be more brief than usual, as I am on leave (study leave followed by vacation) for four weeks from July 15 through August 12. During this time, emergency pastoral care is available for you by contacting the church office. Our emergency pastoral care clergy person is the very dear Pastor Claudine Carlson. Please do reach out if you need pastoral care, and the office will connect you directly with Pastor Claudine.

During my leave, I will not be responding to emails and phone calls. This allows me to focus on the study leave tasks of preparing a blog site to be connected to our church website, as well as preparing some reconvening worship-and-debrief modules for when we gather again, in small groups, and eventually for worship. Lorre, Gee or Bonnie may add notes to this missal week over week to keep you updated on church re-opening activities if there is any new news. If it is safe to do so, and all preparations are completed, we anticipate resuming worship sometime in September.

During the Sundays of my leave, you have the very special treat of hearing from many church voices: Bonnie Berg has agreed to prepare the message for Sunday July 19th, Lorre Calder for Sunday July 26th, Nicholas Stienberg for August 2nd and Lorre again for August 9th. We are blessed to have so many wonderful gifts in our family.

You remain in my heart and my prayers – every single one of you ☺ And, as things are opened up, the COVID-19 virus remains alive and well. For us to likewise remain alive and well, precautions are advised: safe distancing, avid handwashing and polite consideration of and respect for the fears of others are, at this time, acts of love.

Please exercise these acts of love generously. God be with you in every possible way ☺

- with love, in Christ, Pastor Janaki.

You are all encouraged to keep Pastor Janaki in your prayers over the next several weeks. We pray that she will return rested, renewed, and recharged.

**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: Faithful God, most merciful judge, you care for your children with firmness and compassion. By your Spirit nurture us who live in your kingdom, that we may be rooted in the way of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

The First Lesson: Isaiah 44:6-8

Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.
Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.
Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!
Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one. (NRSV)
Word of God, word of life. ***C: Thanks be to God.*** *

The Psalm - Psalm 86:11-17

Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth;
give me an undivided heart to revere your name.

I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart,
and glorify your name forevermore.

For great is your love toward me;
you have delivered me from the pit of death.

The arrogant rise up against me, O God, and a band of violent people seeks my life;
they have not set you before their eyes.

But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion,
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

Turn to me and have mercy on me;
give your strength to your servant, and save the child of your handmaid.

Show me a sign of your favor, so that those who hate me may see it and be put to shame;
because you, LORD, have helped me and comforted me.

The Second Lesson: Romans 8:12-25

So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. (NRSV)

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

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 video.

Christ Has Arisen, Alleluia (ELW #364)

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

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

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The Holy Gospel according to Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

C: Glory to you O Lord.

Jesus put before [the crowds] another parable: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, 'Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?' He answered, 'An enemy has done this.' The slaves said to him, 'Then do you want us to go and gather them?' But he replied, 'No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.'"

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!" (NRSV)

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

Sermon (By Bonnie Berg) Click here to access the audio file for the sermon, <https://youtu.be/bN4UnFQUP6U> or imagine Bonnie's voice here:

It was like learning how to be the pilot of an airplane while flying an airplane; manual in one hand to review procedures, laptop in the other to google how the controls worked, and headset on to consult with other student-pilots about how we were each succeeding.

My analogy here, albeit imperfect, seems fitting for the '**it**' of **Online Distance Learning** that suddenly began in March of 2020. I was the pilot of 19 passengers, the teacher of grade 2 students, as we were suddenly thrown into a pandemic-induced school closure. I have been to a lot of education-courses and read a lot of professional articles and even led many teacher workshops, but nothing had ever taught me how to teach 7 year olds exclusively through a computer screen. *I had to think, and try things out, and think some more!*

After the initial stress and chaos, I ended up really liking it in many ways. The kids' response to storytime was a favourite. A few times a week, I would send a video recording of myself reading a picture book, then ask the children to send me a message sharing their thoughts on a certain idea in the story. There were always 1 or 2 students who surprised and delighted me with their thoughtful interpretation. I could encourage them in their learning, and they could communicate their interesting ideas and maybe the 'moral of the story' as it applied to their own lives.

I think that is what Jesus was waiting for as he 'went into the house' before explaining the Parable.

Jesus told a story. He told a story about seeds and weeds. He told a story about an enemy and his sabotage. He told a story about workers and a problem. He told a story about a boss and his solution.

Then he stopped. Visualize it. Hear the silence. After telling the story, Jesus stares expectantly at the crowd, they stare back blank-faced. No one moves. He waits. Some dust kicks up from the ground and swirls between them. He waits. There is an awkward cough. He waits. A child fidgets and says, "Mom can we go home now?" He sends them on their way.

He goes inside.

The disciples are still standing there and I can just imagine Thomas being the first to say, "I don't get it." James and John probably had a little argument -

"You ask Him."

"I'm not going to ask Him. You ask Him."

"I'm not going to ask Him. You ask Him."

Finally, Peter pipes up, "I'll ask Him." And out of a sense of duty, they go in to ask him to explain.

It may just be me, but I don't think Jesus wanted to explain the Parable right away. I hear him reluctantly saying, "The farmer who sows the pure seed is the Son of Man..." with his voice rising at the end, extending the word 'Man' as his head tilts to the side, eyebrows raised, hand gesturing palm up and sideways. He wants them to think about it. To question, to discern. He has an expectation of the cognitive struggle. He wants them to figure it out, and to apply it to their own lives.

Jesus wants us too to think, to struggle, to reflect and to contemplate.

When Pastor Janaki asked me to share a message with you, it really challenged me to think and struggle. What could I possibly have to share that would be of any value to you all? I haven't been taught how to write a sermon. I have no idea what the original Greek or Hebrew translation might mean. I have no real interest in researching the historical context.

But reading this Scripture a few weeks ago and knowing I would need a teaching point has been a real blessing to me. Each day, as I spend a short or long amount of time in my vegetable garden and flower beds, I have been reflecting on the Parable and the weeds in my own life. I have come up with 3 'truths-according-to-Bonnie.'

It's often hard to tell the weeds from the plants.

It's prudent to pull small weeds.

Be slow and gentle while pulling big weeds close to the plant. Hold the good stem down in the soil.

So I have absolutely no idea if my truths will make a difference to you, but here goes...

It's often hard to tell the weeds from the plants. We moved into our current home 10 years ago and I began to garden by-gosh-and-by-golly. I had no idea what was what. Some of you avid gardeners are going to laugh at me, but a decade later, I'm still fooled by the goldenrod growing amidst the phlox. Their leaves look awfully similar to me. Just like in our Parable today when the farmhands didn't recognize the weeds until the wheat was close to maturity, I don't recognize the weed until I see that bright and allergy-inducing bloom open up! In the Distance Learning that I spoke about in my introduction, a lot of parents, a LOT of parents, struggled with basic compliance in their child to do their online schoolwork. So I have been reflecting on those things in my life that seem helpful that maybe are not so helpful. Here's an example. Pre-lockdown, when I would be out and about, I found myself being jealous of parents of young children who could just go about their business. A child starts fussing, they are handed a smartphone with a wonderful soothing and entertaining and educational movie to watch and all is fine. So easy! So wonderful! When Alycia and Aaron were babies and toddlers, it would be a monumental effort to leave the house. Are they fed? Have they had enough sleep? Do I have the mom-magic-kit of cheerios and books and toys? But wait - maybe that's a weed that looks like a plant. Maybe the struggle was good for me. Maybe in the bank, when my children were screaming and all judgmental eyes were on me, maybe I learned how to parent. Maybe the 'not easy' was good for me. Hmm. We all need to think of whether there are weeds in our own lives that look like plants. Have I been justifying a certain way of being that is in fact getting in the way of my right relationship with God and others?

My next point - **it's prudent to pull small weeds.** I found it a little odd that the farmer in the story told his workers to let the weeds grow. They must have been pretty big and well-established weeds! What were those farmhands thinking while they were ignoring the crop for so long? In my garden, if the soil is wet (hmm...there's a baptism analogy in there somewhere) and if the weed is small, it's quite easy to pull. So here's an example of a small weed that should have been pulled. Returning to my observation of how homeschooling during covid seems to have pointed out a parenting crisis, I wonder - have we been planting little weeds in our children? (And I do mean 'we'. Parenting is a tough job and it is supported or not by a community and indeed the attitudes of the larger society.) Have we failed to pull out those small weeds?

Accept the simple example of children's fashion choices. I googled, "t-shirts for kids with cute sayings." Peek at what came up first:



There are all kinds of t-shirts with adorable little sayings that we initially smile at. But what effect is all that messaging having? We didn't recognize this as a weed. It didn't seem like anything harmful. It seemed adorable. It seemed funny. It seemed sweet. Maybe there's a subtle connection to the increase of behavioural challenges I have been experiencing in my classroom in the past few years. Certainly there are some very deep and challenging issues that we are trying to right in society, but that doesn't mean that we should ignore these little weeds. The big issues often seem overwhelming to me. I'm thinking that we can start by reflecting on small weeds that need to be pulled in our lives.

My third truth is this - **be slow and gentle while pulling big weeds close to the plant. Hold the good stem down in the soil.** I admittedly have many, many little weeds far away from my stem. When my dear David points out that maybe I should stop eating so many sweets (oh, how I LOVE cookies) I don't really like it, but I can usually summon up some control for a few days (okay, okay, truth be told, maybe a few hours or at least minutes). Or when I realize on a zoom call that I tend to interrupt people when they are speaking, I can usually make a personal goal to listen better and control the sharing of my own opinion. But when the weed is a big one, really close to my heart and my sense of self, it is very, very difficult to confront. When my insightful-beyond-her-years young adult daughter points out after leaving an extended family gathering that my family has a 'judgmental air' about them, I have to really watch my reaction. I want to deny it because it hurts and it is close to my heart. I need others to gently hold me down and keep my roots in God's good soil as I pull that critical thought pattern from my life. Or if my dear and loving Pastor points out that I am living a life of white upper middle class privilege and I need to study my own prejudices and racist behaviours, it is hard to hear. Very very hard. And so I must stay *WITH* God to pull that weed from my life.

I am quite fine if you completely reject my truths. I readily admit that if you finish reading Jesus' explanation of the Parable, my points have very little to do with His! But I return to my initial thought - that our dear, dear Saviour Jesus wants us to **think**. He loves us SO completely and desires to be in relationship with us. When we are grappling with His stories, we are praying without ceasing. When we are reflecting on our own lives, we are showing a desire to live out the Gospel love with all His children. I may be wrong, and you may be doubting, but we are growing. It's like trying to learn how to be a pilot while we are flying a plane! We are growing as His redeemed and blessed and treasured and special children.

Amen.

Hymn of the Day – Lord Let my heart be Good Soil

Click here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RezBJBQsEBs>

Our prayers of the people 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 and turn up the sound for our familiar sung version, with Brad on organ, and Helga singing:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qKpchRaebQ>

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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://youtu.be/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: For the Beauty of the Earth

Click here: <https://youtu.be/AFPhyp7fvJI>

Text: Folliott S. Pierpoint Music: Conrad Kocher Words: Public Domain Music: Public Domain
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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.***