

BEFORE WE WORSHIP, WE REFLECT ..

In today's gospel readings, we hear some of the parables Jesus uses to explain the nature of the kingdom of God. And these parables help us recognize a gospel message that runs counter to the power-games and control-narratives of this world. This is a story that is about mustard seeds and yeast: tiny things that have a huge impact, with time and effort.

What small, ordinary things are you doing in your daily life that have a huge impact on others, and tells them of the extraordinary love of God? It is those small, intentional efforts, combined with all the intentional efforts of others to reach out and make a difference, to share God's love and vision of Shalom that helps to bring about the Kingdom of God. May it be so.

SERVICE OF WORSHIP

JULY 30, 2023 – NINTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

▲ = Please stand in body or in spirit.

MUSIC TO GATHER US IN: "People Get Ready," sung by David Dillon

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.

WELCOME AND SHARING IN COMMUNITY LIFE

MINUTE FOR MISSION: LEARNING THE GOSPEL AT CAMP

Lindsay Vautour, the United Church's Engagement and Stewardship Associate, started attending a United Church camp at the tender age of five. There, she not only met lifelong friends and gained job skills as a counsellor, but it also helped chart her course to eventually work for The United Church of Canada.

“Coming from a financially tight background, I’m extremely grateful for the assistance available that let my brother and me attend camp every summer. I met so many different people from different cultures and regions, and got to learn their journeys in faith. I still keep in contact with some camp friends over 20 years later,” she says.

“One of my most prominent memories was with a fellow 13-year-old camper who told me that she loved camp because she could be herself without any expectations. She said, ‘I’m not the weird kid or the foster kid here, I’m just me,’” she recounts. “That’s something I resonate with because I wasn’t particularly popular in school, but popularity never mattered at camp, and it’s beautiful to know that that’s a widely shared perception.”

Children come together at United Church camps across Canada to learn the gospel in a safe and supportive environment. Through campfire stories, hiking, music, canoeing, and so much more, campers gain confidence while enjoying unique activities and exploring their curiosity. At camp kids learn soft skills like self-confidence, patience, and organization as well as hard skills in sports, crafting, and music.

Without the generosity of supporters, children who attend camp wouldn’t be able to continue having such affirming and defining experiences. Your gifts through Mission and Service are deeply appreciated.

CENTERING (a time of silence in preparation for worship)

LIGHTING OF THE CHRIST CANDLE

One: Jesus is the Light of the World!

All: **May he shine through us every day.**

GATHERING MUSIC: "Sanctuary" (sing twice)

MV #18

**Lord, prepare me to be a sanctuary,
pure and holy, tried and true.
With thanksgiving, I'll be a living
sanctuary for you.**

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Creator of the Cosmos, who knows what the kingdom of God is like but also remembers what it was like before –

All: before creation and kingdoms, before mustard seeds and fine pearls, before yeast and bakers to make bread.

One: So, you know what it is like to long for them, to imagine them into being,

All: And it is from this longing for your kingdom and for you that we enter our time of worship.

One: Yes, come, let us praise our God of hope and promise.

**All: Let us rejoice in the Good News together –
how nothing can separate us from the presence of God.**

OPENING PRAYER (said together)

Holy God, Giver of all good gifts, we come together today to offer you our praise in song and prayer, to grow in faith as we pay careful attention to your teachings, and to be nourished as we share the gifts of the bread and the cup at the invitation of Jesus Christ. And in this experience of being here together, in this time set apart to be side-by-side in community, we are reminded how connected we already are. Let us open ourselves to your presence here. Let us seek first, the kingdom of God, and in our searching, may we be found by you, the One who searches for us first. Amen.

**Seek ye first the kingdom of God
and God's righteousness,
and all these things shall be added unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.**

**Ask and it shall be given unto you;
seek and you shall find;
knock and the door shall be opened unto you.
Hallelu, hallelujah.**

**We do not live by bread alone,
but by every word
that proceeds from the mouth of God.
Hallelu, hallelujah.**

INVITATION TO WHOLENESS AND RIGHT RELATIONSHIP

When we admit our faults and our failings, we make room for the still, small voice of God to speak, to us and through us. Before God, with the people of God, let us confess the ways we separate ourselves from God and from one another.

PRAYER FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS (said together)

Jesus, who sat at the table with outcasts and sinners, we confess that too often our words and actions are not consistent with our beliefs. Often we ignore the needy, show indifference to the lonely, and reject those who seem different from us. Forgive us, we pray. Empower us to reach out in love and acceptance. Amen.

(A brief time of silent reflection.)

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S NEVER-ENDING GRACE AND MERCY

One: Hear the good news: there is no place we can go where God cannot find us. The One who could accuse us, saves us from sin and death. The One who could condemn us, cradles us in grace. The One who could punish us, awaits us with open arms, loving us with a never-ending, unconditional love and guiding us to being our best selves.

All: **Now we know, there is nothing, not a thing, that can separate us from the love of God. Thanks be to the One who forgives us and makes us whole. Amen.**

READINGS FROM OUR FAITH TRADITION

Romans 8:26–39

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Matthew 13:31–33, 44–52

He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’

He told them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.’

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

‘Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

‘Have you understood all this?’ They answered, ‘Yes.’ And he said to them, ‘Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.’

For the Word of God in scripture,
For the Word of God within us,
For the Word of God among us,
Thanks be to God!

SERMON: “The Kingdom of God is like ...”

THE SACRAMENT OF HOLY COMMUNION

The Invitation

Jesus teaches about the contrast between small beginnings and great endings. The tiny mustard seed can grow into a very large shrub! So, too, can these tiny gifts of bread and juice be transformed into a faith feast. What is less than a full bite serves each of us, like a vitamin, providing increased health and capacity for life!

Come, then, to this table.

Come, not because you are famished and need to fill your stomach, but because you are hungry in spirit. Understand these elements connect us to the disciples in an upper room long ago and to the God who is at work in all times and in all places, drawing each of us closer to God’s fully-realized Realm.

All are invited to share in this feast!

Hymn: "Long Ago and Far Away" (verses 1 and 2)

MV #195

Long ago and far away

Jesus lived and worked and prayed

healed the sick and the fearful and lonely

lived his life to show us God's way.

Stretched his arms out as he said

Fill the cup and share the bread

Remember me in love and joy and blessing.

Jesus gathered the children around him,

spoke of Love and the joy to be found

told them stories of wisdom and wonder

God's creation in all that's around.

Stretched his arms out as he said

Fill the cup and share the bread

Remember me in love and joy and blessing.

The Great Thanksgiving Prayer

The Holy One be with you

And also with you

Open your hearts to the One who is Love

We open our hearts to you, O God

Let us give thanks to God, our life-breath

To the One who sustains us, we rejoice in your presence!

Holy Mystery that is Wholly Love,

you are beyond complete knowledge,

above perfect description.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit;

Source of Life, Living Word, and Bond of Love,

you are creative and self-giving, generously moving.

In all the near and distant corners of the universe.

nothing exists that does not find its source in you.

(based on A Song of Faith)

Even when we turn away from you, you are with us;
your presence never fails us,
your gifts of hope and new life transform us.
We praise you for Jesus Christ,
eternal as your love, our bond to one another.
We rejoice with all your people of every time and place,
and with angels and archangels,
to proclaim the glory of your name:

Holy, holy, holy are you.
Holy, holy, blessed are you.

It is Jesus, God incarnate, the Risen Christ,
who joins us together as a community of broken but hopeful believers:
loving what he loved
living what he taught, and
striving to be his faithful servants
in our time and place.

In this meal we remember Jesus.
We remember his promises, and the price he paid for who he was,
what he said, and what he did.

On the night of his arrest, he gathered around table with his companions.
He took bread, blessed it, broke it, gave it to his disciples and said,
“This is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.”

He did the same with the cup after the supper, saying,
“This cup of blessing that is poured out is the new covenant.”

We do remember.
We remember his life of love, his friendship, his teaching, his dying,
and his rising to life again.

In sharing this meal, we live out the mystery of our faith: **Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come to us again**

Holy Mystery, God the Spirit,
we call on you to transform these familiar things,
as you continually transform the world around us.
Bless this bread and this cup, the wheat and the grape,
the farmer and the harvest, the seed and the sower.
So that in the sharing of these simple elements in community, we may taste
and see your goodness, so that we might catch a glimpse of what it is to be
in communion with you and with one another.

Pour out your Spirit on this bread and this cup, that through these ordinary
gifts, we might taste a glimpse of your Kingdom. May they be for us a
reminder of what we are capable of becoming and what we are capable of
accomplishing together. Through Christ, in Christ, and with Christ, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory is yours, God most holy, now and forever.

Hear us now as we pray the words Jesus taught, saying,
“Our Father Amen.”

Breaking the Bread, Pouring the Cup

The body of Christ, the bread of life.
The lifeblood of Christ, the cup of blessing.
The gifts of God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God!

Sharing the Meal

Prayer after Communion

Thank you, O Christ, for this feast of life. We are fed by your love; we are strengthened by your life. We are sent forth into this world to live into the visions God has laid on our hearts. We are now commissioned to feed as we have been fed, forgive as we have been forgiven, love as we have been loved. Thanks be to God! Amen.

Hymn: “Long Ago and Far Away” (verse 3)

MV #195

**Jesus called all his friends to be with him
share the bread and the cup once again
life to you I will offer it gladly
love will be with you right to the end.**

**Stretched his arms out as he said
Fill the cup and share the bread
Remember me in love and joy and blessing.**

INVITATION TO INVEST IN GOD’S MISSION

Have you ever wondered if your offering really makes a difference? It could be easy to feel like it’s nothing more than a drop of water in a bucket, but Jesus says that the kingdom of heaven is like a tiny mustard seed that grows into a huge shrub. From the smallest of seeds, a home and resting place is created for the birds of the air. Your offering does make a difference! Let us give generously, both to local outreach initiatives and to Mission and Service.

MINISTRY OF MUSIC: “Spirit, Open My Heart,” sung by David Dillon

▲ OFFERING HYMN: “What Can I Do” (sing twice)`

MV #191

**What can I do? What can I bring?
What can I say? What can I sing?
I'll sing with joy, I'll say a prayer,
I'll bring my love, I'll do my share.**

▲ DEDICATION OF THE OFFERING (said together)

Gracious God, you offer us connection to your Realm through the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus. We share our resources as a response to your unconditional love and ask that you accept these gifts as signs and symbols of our desire to live more fully as your Kingdom people.

Help us use all that has been offered this day to claim the treasure, grateful for the life you desire for each of us as individuals and in our life together. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

One: "O God, hear our prayer "

All: and, in your love, answer.

▲ HYMN: "For the Beauty of the Earth"

VU #226

**For the beauty of the earth
For the beauty of the skies
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise**

**For the beauty of the hour
of the day and of the night
Hill and vale and tree and flower
Sun and moon and stars of light
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise**

**For the joy of human love
Brother, sister, parent, child
Friends on earth and friends above
For all gentle thoughts and mild
Lord of all, to thee we raise
This our joyful hymn of praise**

COMMISSIONING AND BENEDICTION

One: We have gathered today in God's house to hear again God's good news, to rest in God's presence, and to share with one another.

All: **Now we go forth from this place to take all that we have heard and done here and offer it up to others, so they too can know of our God and seek to follow.**

One: And now may the God who created us, the Christ who has saved us, and the Holy Spirit who empowers and guides us each day, bless, protect and keep us for this day and forevermore.

Many: **And you as well.**

All: **Amen.**

▲ HYMN: "May the God of Hope"

VU #424

**May the God of hope go with us every day,
filling all our lives with love and joy and peace.
May the God of justice speed us on our way,
bringing light and hope to every land and race.**

**Praying, let us work for peace,
singing, share our joy with all.
working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call.**

**May the God of healing free the earth from fear,
freeing us for peace, both treasured and pursued.
May the God of love keep our commitment clear
to a world restored, to human life renewed.**

**Praying, let us work for peace,
singing, share our joy with all.
working for a world that's new,
faithful when we hear Christ's call.**