



St. Andrew's United Church of Christ

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SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 20, 2020

10:00 A.M.



Dear Friends in Christ,

"This is the day that the Lord hath made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!" As we gather for worship this morning, whether it's in-person worship in the sanctuary or in-home worship, we ask that this one hour will frame the hours of this new week so that we may find good in the gift of each day and grace for each moment.

It is easier to say "hello" than "goodbye." During worship we have the difficult challenge of saying, "goodbye" to Cindy Adams who has served capably as the church office administrator for the last two years. The congregation has been blessed by her responsible and energetic spirit, computer and social media knowledge and organizational and people skills. Cindy has made a positive influence in giving direction to the life of the congregation. Join us today in saying farewell and thank you to Cindy.

You will be missed and "may the Lord be always with you" in the days to come.

Peace and Prayers

In Christ,

Pastor Bigelow

PRAYER FOR THE BEGINNING OF WORSHIP —

Eternal God, as we worship draw nearer to us even as we draw near to you. Amid the cares and concerns of our daily lives, make us attentive to your voice and alert to presence that we may treasure your word above all else. We ask this through Christ our Lord, Amen.

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

RINGING OF THE BELL AND CHIMES

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

Let us worship God, the eternal source of love and life.

Let us worship Jesus Christ who lives among us.

Let us worship the Spirit who renews us daily.

To the one triune and true God, be praise in all times and in all places.

SALUTATION

May grace and peace be yours in abundance in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.

Amen.

([2 Peter 1:2](#))

The Lord be with you!

And also, with you!

(based on [Ruth 2:4](#))

GATHERING HYMN

[How Great Thou Art](#) #1

OPENING PRAYER

Lord, our God, you are always readier to give your good gifts to us that we are to seek them, and you are willing to give more than we desire or deserve. In our worship today, help us to seek that we may truly find, so to ask that we may joyfully receive, and knock that the door of your mercy may be opened to us, through Jesus Christ, our Savior, Amen.

WE ARE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT

CALL TO CONFESSION

When we gather to praise God, we remember that we are a people who have preferred our wills to God's will, our way to God's way. Accepting his power to become new persons in Christ, let us confess our sin before God and one another. Let us pray.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Lord of the harvest, we thank you that your gospel has been sown freely among all people, and thank you for those who have tended your field before us. We praise you for your wisdom, guidance, and your promise that one day the sheaves will be gathered into your garner forevermore, and that an end will come the weeds that threaten to choke and spoil your crop. We confess that there are times when all we see are the weeds. We become discouraged or bitter, and we want to take matters into our own hands, or question whether the seed you have sown is good.

Forgive us, Lord, and deliver us from our short sightedness, and equip us once again to become faithful and patient servants in your work, through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE AND FORGIVENESS

This is the message we have heard from God and proclaim to you, that God is light and in God there is no darkness at all. If we walk in the light, as God is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

[\(1 John 1:5,7\)](#)

GOD'S DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES

Then God spoke all these words:

² I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before^[a] me.

⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation^[b] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

¹² Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ You shall not murder.^[c]

¹⁴ You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ You shall not steal.

¹⁶ You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

[\(Exodus 20: 1 -17\)](#)

WE HEAR AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

New Testament — [Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43](#)

SERMON — *The Problem with Weeds* (found on pages 6-9)

HYMN OF RESPONSE

[The Battle is the Lord's](#) #475

FAREWELL TO CINDY

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Eternal and mysterious God, we thank you for the wonder and beauty of the earth, sky, and sea; and for all that is gracious, in men, women, and children revealing the image of Christ. For our daily food and drink, our homes, family, and friends; for minds to think, hearts to love, and hands to serve; we thank you.

Thank you for health and strength, for work and leisure, for brave and courageous people who are patient in suffering and faithful in adversity; for those who are valiant seekers after truth, liberty, and justice. Above all we give thanks for the great mercies and promises given to us in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We ask Lord, that you will fill our lives with your compassion that may live with in the generosity of your forgiveness. Nudge those who cannot believe or give their lives in service to you and show them the way of your love.

We pray for your church to make your light shine in this dark and broken world. Help us to stand with the disenfranchised that we may be in Christ's service to the sick and neglected, in the proclamation of the gospel, that 'your kingdom will come and that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven'.

We lift up those who are going through a difficult time of discouragement and despair; be a source of confidence in their lives.

We pray for those in the close circles that surround us; children and parents, sisters and brothers, husbands and wives, grandparents and cousins, friends and neighbors, especially those that are in our thoughts today.

We pray this through Jesus Christ who taught us to pray:

***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 debts, as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.***

WE GO FORTH TO REVEAL JESUS CHRIST IN THE WORLD

PARTING HYMN

[Blest Be the Tie that Binds](#) #209

BENEDICTION

May the love of God, the Father, the faithful creator, the peace of Christ, the wounded healer, the joy of the challenging Spirit, the hope of the Triune God – Three in One surround and encourage you today, tonight and forever.

AMEN!

POSTLUDE

SERMON – *The Parable of Weeds Among the Wheat*

Scripture – Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

If you have a garden or lawn to maintain, then you have been challenged with the problem of weeds. No matter how hard one tries to keep their garden or lawn free of weeds, somehow they manage to find their way in, start growing and overtake the good green grass or vegetables. What does one do about weeds?

That question is posed in the scripture lesson today. In Jesus' time, people lived close to the land and depended on the growing season in a more intimate way than we do today; although farmers will understand this fragile relationship better than most of us.

Jesus knew something about farming and how a person could not distinguish a kernel of wheat from a weed and the danger of how the crop might be damaged if one tried to separate the two before the time of harvest. If the weeds were pulled up prematurely, the good crop may be pulled up as well. Jesus understood this danger as did those listening to him preach this lesson.

Jesus wasn't advising his listeners about being good farmers or having weed free lawns. In this parable, Jesus is preaching once again about God, God's kingdom and reign and those who were worried about being choked out by evil.

In an old Peanuts cartoon, Charlie Brown is confronted by Lucy who says to him, "Charlie Brown, you are crabgrass on the lawn of life!" For Lucy, in her anger, Charlie Brown is a hinderance, a sore spot, that keeps life from being what she thinks it ought to be.

Dandelions and weeds are those people or problems that keep life from being the way it should be, people and problems that interfere with God's will for creation. We are keenly aware of some of those weeds in the field in which God has placed us. Those that tear down life, rather than build up life, those that lie and cheat to get a head, those that exploit others for their own personal gain, those that hurt and harm others rather than help and affirm. We see those weeds all around us!

The parable goes deeper though and shows us the field as God sees it, not as we see it from our limited perceptions. The kingdom of God goes beyond dandelions mixed with green grass on the lawn of life. Jesus reveals that more powerful and cosmic forces are present and likens it to the conflict between good and evil. You see, Jesus is the good sower and bears the good seed. In his life, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension; the Gospel has been proclaimed. God's saving grace has been offered to the world, abundantly and without reservation, but at the same time, God's enemy, Satan, which means "adversary," has been busy at work sowing bad seed which grows into useless plants that threaten to choke out the tender and vulnerable growth in Christ.

Jesus is telling us that wheat and weeds grow together and sometimes cannot be told apart, so that in pulling up a weed plant, one might also uproot a wheat plant...so be careful! It was not the job of the servants to systematically purge the fields and not their job to point fingers of final judgement on other groups.

The harvest in the parable is the day of judgement when Christ and his angels will gather the fruit of the good seed. This is the day of reckoning when we shall be known by our fruits. There will be no mistaken identity between the wheat and the weeds, when we shall not see through a glass darkly, but clearly as scripture says. Scripture speaks about judgement more in terms of metaphorical language, rather than exactly what will happen and when. Sometimes, we find it frustrating as we wait for God's judgement and mercy, but we can be satisfied by the assurance that evil will not have the last word and destroy what God has planted.

How can we live faithfully until that day? As followers of Christ today, we take our places beside the servants in this passage by using caution in labeling the wheat and weeds. Political dialogue is extremely polarized today in which people are labeling one another as wheat or weeds, good or evil. Differences of thought and opinion have been elevated to good or evil which becomes dangerously divisive.

Hitler was able to do this to the Jews. He labeled them as weeds. First, he dehumanized them, making them into something less than human beings and with this label, opened all sorts of doors for the evil One to work. He then demonized them, making the Jewish people the reason for all of Germany's problems. And finally, Hitler defied the Jewish people, offering the perception of more power than they really had. In following this process, in making a people, the weeds, he was able to carry out an extermination of 6 million Jews.

In listening to our conversations today, there is a great need of caution in our dialogue as we label the "other." Let's not be so quick to call a person or group a weed. Immigrants, people of color, people who are different; are being dehumanized, and labeled as animals opening the door for the evil One to work. They are being demonized as the source of all or many of our country's problems. And then these same people are being deified and given the perception of more power than they really have. It's a recipe for the weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The seeds of wheat and weeds often look alike. Let's be careful in making those judgements. The sermon concludes with the words that Jesus uses to conclude the Parable. "Let anyone with ears, listen!"
Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ✚ Sunday, September 20th Worship Service at 10:00 am including a Farewell to Cindy Adams.
- ✚ Sunday, September 20th, Pastoral Relations at 11:00 am.
- ✚ Monday, September 21st, Consistory at 5:00 pm.
- ✚ Sunday, September 27th, Worship Service at 10:00 am led by Gordon Darr.
- ✚ Monday, September 28th, Blood Drive from 1:00 pm-7:00 pm
- ✚ Tuesday, September 29th, Blood Drive from 1:00 pm-7:00 pm
- ✚ The **Crop Hunger Walk for the Chelsea/Dexter** area is scheduled for **Sunday, October 4th**.
To maintain social distancing and safety, walkers should plan on wearing masks if you choose to walk on that Sunday. There will not be an official large group starting time or post group gathering this year. If you are more comfortable walking on another day, or in another place, that is fine. Maps with the designated routes are available on the Sanctuary table and attached to this week's worship materials. If you are interested in participating or supporting the Crop Hunger Walk this year, please contact Karen McIlroy at 734.426.6372 or after church on Sunday. As in past years, 25% of the funds collected will go to Faith in Action in Chelsea/Dexter. In 2019, over \$9,000 was given to Faith in Action.
- ✚ **Rummage Sale Update:** It has been decided to postpone the fall rummage sale until after January 1st. St. Andrew's members may bring donations to the church in the meantime and store them in the back rooms.
- ✚ St. Andrews would like to welcome Stephanie Mann as our new church office manager. Stephanie has experience in church office management, and she has also been a teacher for middle and high school students. Stephanie is currently working with Cindy Adams to learn as much as possible before Cindy leaves us. Stephanie is excited to help our church family and community as we continue forward together.