



St. Andrew's United Church of Christ

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FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

September 13, 2020

10:00 A.M.



Dear Friends in Christ,

This note is being written on the day after Labor Day, or generally considered the first day of school for many students. Usually, one sees a fleet or armada of yellow school buses on the streets, but this year I didn't see one! Perhaps I just missed seeing them or they were not in service. With the beginning of this new school year, we are reminded yet again, that things are different.

I think of students returning to school, in person or remotely, who are being introduced to new learning styles; teachers are on uncharted waters, with new teaching methods; parents and grandparents are making significant adjustments to their roles; while administrators, staff, coaches and sports programs are all trying to find their way in this new environment. Our educational system, students, educators and all the other people involved, are certainly a part of our prayer process for this week.

St. Andrew's is in a similar situation with the congregation facing a different looking fall season as well. It's my prayer that God will help us find meaning in this new world; give us the ability to see joy and hope, that might be hidden; and even thrive in this pandemic. It will require God's grace and our patience as we look forward to ministry together, and the Good News is, that both are available.

As a reminder, next Sunday during worship, we will say farewell to Cindy Adams, the Church Office Manager.

Again, thank you for your continued prayerful and financial support as we seek to be:

Passionate in Community – Growing in Faith – Serving in Christ's Name

Peace and Prayers

In Christ,

Pastor Bigelow

Silent Prayer for the Beginning of Worship —

During the Prelude, speak with God.

During the service, let God speak to you.

After the service, please speak with your neighbor.

WE GATHER TO WORSHIP THE TRIUNE GOD

RINGING OF THE BELL AND CHIMES

WELCOME

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

May our lives profess and proclaim that “our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.”

(Psalm

124:8)

Amen!

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

Therefore, we will not fear,
though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

The Lord of host is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

“Be still and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”

The Lord of host is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

(Psalm 45 selected verses)

SALUTATION

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

(2 Timothy 1:2)

Amen.

The Lord be with you!

And also, with you!

(based on Ruth 2:4)

GATHERING HYMN [God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heavens](#)

OPENING PRAYER

Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your Word. In this time of worship, by your Holy Spirit, help us to receive it with joy and live according to it, so that we may grow in faith and hope and love. Receive our worship that it may be holy, reverent and joyful in your sight. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

WE ARE RENEWED BY THE SPIRIT

CALL TO CONFESSION

Remembering that our Lord Jesus can sympathize with us in our weakness, since in every respect he was tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then, with boldness come before God and one another, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Let us confess our sins against God and our neighbor, let us pray.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Eternal God, our judge and redeemer, we confess that like Adam and Eve, we try to hide from you, for we have done wrong. We have lived for ourselves and apart from you. We have turned from our neighbors and refused to bear the burdens of others. We have ignored the pain of the world and passed by the hungry, the poor and the oppressed.

(silent reflection)

In your mercy, forgive our sins and free us selfishness, that we may choose your will and obey your commandments, through Jesus Christ our Savior we pray, Amen.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Here are words you may trust, words that merit full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. To all who confess their sins and resolve to lead a new life, he says, "Your sins are forgiven." He also says, "Follow me." Believe this gospel, go forth and live in peace.

GOD'S DIRECTION FOR OUR LIVES

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

For by the grace given to me, I say to everyone among you, not to think of themselves more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgement, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

(Romans 12:1-3)

WE HEAR AND LISTEN TO GOD'S WORD

SCRIPTURE LESSON

New Testament — Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

SERMON – *Waste and Grace* (found on pages 6-9)

HYMN OF RESPONSE [*We Plough the Fields and Scatter*](#)

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Lord God, perhaps in the world's ways, we waste a late summers day gathering here to worship you, but we chose to gather in community, whether in in-person worship or in the space of our homes, knowing that you take this seemingly wasted hour and make it rich with your presence. We praise and thank you for the blessings poured out upon us and all creation, for the gift of each day, each season and each relationship, especially the relationship that is ours with and through the Jesus the Christ in whose life we find life.

We pray this morning for where the Word is preached, sung, or heard in silence, that it may take root in us, reaping the harvest you intended.

We ask for faith to let go of the anxiety of the moment and our future, and to trust that you will faithfully accomplish your purpose for us and all creation.

Give new understanding for those who believe all achievement, all gain, and all harvest comes only through self-effort.

Bring healing and grace for those who give themselves to Christ's ministry only to find rejection and ridicule.

Help us to continue to do our part to end this pandemic. Help us to enact measures to protect others and to express our faith in practical ways. Guide us by your wisdom.

And now as we go in the perplexities of this new week, give us strength and courage to follow Jesus, entrusting ourselves, our work and our witness into your hands to be grown and harvested according to your purpose. Hear these our prayers in Jesus' name, 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 [Lead, Kindly Light](#)

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 – *Waste and Grace*

SCRIPTURE — New Testament – Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

A sower goes out to sow seed and the seed is slung in all different directions. As we looked at this parable last week, we learned that the seed not only goes in different directions, but it lands on different surfaces. Some of it lands on the hard-packed beaten earth path and is immediately consumed by birds; other seeds land on shallow soil that covers shelf rock so that the seed cannot strike a deep root; more seed lands on the ground and begins to grow, but is choked out and kept from bearing fruit. Finally, some of the seeds fall on good soil and brings forth an abundant crop. Again, last week, an aspect and interpretation of the passage led to the question of how each of us is responding to God; and how we are receiving God's word to us in Jesus Christ. What kind of ground does one see themselves in responding to God...the hard packed beaten path, the shallow soil where the seed cannot grow a root system; good soil and early growth, but choked out by thorns, or good soil where abundant growth is taking place.

The Parable of the Sower also suggests that waste is taking place. There is a great deal of wasted seed in this parable. Only a little bit lands on good ground, takes root and contributes to an abundant harvest. Look at all the seed that is wasted!

According to the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was born, cruel King Herod massacred hundreds of innocent Jewish baby boys. Wouldn't it have been better if not so much was made of Jesus being a King, so Herod wouldn't have felt so threatened? Perhaps the news of Jesus' birth could have been toned down a bit, but toning it down isn't what the Gospel is about. And so, the Magi show up, bringing the costliest gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And lay these most expensive gifts at the feet of the holy family.

The exuberant extravagance continues. Jesus continually speaks to great crowds, "multitudes" as in today's passage, but how many come forward to follow...only 12?

Think of how some of the other parables spoke of waste. There was the shepherd who risked the welfare of 99 sheep in order to search for the one lost sheep until he found it; or the parable of the man who extends an invitation to come to a banquet, but all of those invited refuse to attend; or the Samaritan who gave all that he had to bandage the wounds of a man lying in a ditch that he didn't even know. There is something in these parables about extravagance and waste.

What could be more wasteful than for Jesus to lay down his life for people like us?

Let me confess to not like seeing anything go to waste. I save the paper clips from letters that I receive; still will bend down to pick up a penny; turn the lights out when leaving a room; turn

the heat down or AC up and when our adult children were growing up, I felt like the house policeman; following them around turning off lights and readjusting thermostats. Now, it's the grandchildren!

We like efficiency, where nothing goes to waste. Remember "Cheaper by the Dozen," that lively account of the life of a large family that was presided over by one of America's professional efficiency experts. This man taught the children how to live efficiently...taught them a number of foreign languages by posting words on the walls of the family bathroom because he computed that the average person spend "x" amount of hours in the bathroom; so why waste those hours.

So, the poor farmer in today's parable has a great deal working against him, from lousy soil to rocks and weeds. How can the farmer expect to grow anything? And there is a great deal against the Gospel today. We live in a violent, anxious and greedy world; while the Gospel invites us to join Jesus in living in peace, self-giving and grace. That's really what the church is against. It's a counter cultural message, all the work that goes into proclaiming that message can seem to fall on deaf ears, bringing only discouragement and disappointment.

But, that is not the whole story of Jesus' parable of the seed and the soil, which speaks not only of waste and unproductive seed; but also, of a gracious harvest. Jesus did hint that most of the seed went to waste, but some of the seed, wonder of wonders, took root, grew and brought 30, 50 and 100 times over, a rich reward.

"Let anyone with ears, listen..."

This parable ends in joy and in celebration of a great harvest. There is waste, much futile effort, ruined seed, disappointing results, but ends in astounding success. The wastefulness ought not to surprise us, there is a lot of bad soil out there. We speak truth in a world of lies; call people to walk the narrow path-way, when it is easier to walk on the wide path. In the Sermon on the Mountain, Jesus calls people to higher living, while they are content with lower expectations.

So, you ask, why witness to your faith if it is only going to fall on deaf ears? Or why do what's right, when 9 out of 10 people are quite content to "go along, to get along." Maybe you have seen in your family how different members respond to the Gospel...you have done everything you could, for some family members that falls on deaf ears, but for other members, it lands and grows. Or you have worked long and hard here at St. Andrew's and wonder if that effort was a waste of your time...there is waste and defeat, failure in faith, there's no doubt about that. But Jesus doesn't leave us there. He promised or even threatened a harvest; our work, our witness is not in vain. The promise of a harvest is just enough to keep us uneasy with our accommodation of defeat. There is waste, but in the end, a few seeds take root and grow into a rich harvest and so there is grace.

Perhaps some of you served as Sunday School teachers, or on Consistory; and there was a student whose faith grew or a Consistory project that really ministered to the church or community.

As a young man, John Harvard immigrated from England to America. All predicted the brightest future for him as a brilliant scholar. He died only after one year. When he died, he left a little over 700 pounds and a collection of a little more than 200 books to a new university in America; a university that became Harvard University. The death of John Harvard looked like a waste, but it produced an abundant harvest.

In your life, and mine, there might be a sense of waste or results that are delayed; but though delayed, the harvest will come. In God's kingdom, a great deal of waste, frustration and defeat come with the territory; yet by the grace of God, in God's own time, there shall be a harvest...gracious...surprising...and a sometimes disarming harvest.









"Let anyone with ears, listen!"

Amen.

Let us pray.

Lord God, we thank you for this parable of Jesus, these earthly stories with heavenly meanings that teach us something about you and your kingdom in our present reality. Help us hear, and listen so that we may grow to be more Christ-like each day. In Jesus' name, Amen.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

-  Sunday, September 13th Worship Service at 10:00 am led by Pastor Bigelow.
-  Today's Altar Flowers are from Jack and Karen McIlroy and are in memory of John and Jean McIlroy.
-  Monday, September 14th, **American Red Cross Blood Drive**, 1:00-7:00 pm.
-  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.
-  Margaret Barrett's daughter, Lori, called the church office to let us know that Margaret has moved into Caretel Inn of Brighton #401 at 1014 East Grand River, Brighton, MI 48116

and her phone number is 734.645.7836. Lori says that cards and phone calls will be welcomed!

✚ We now have new Altar Flower Ordering Procedures – in the basket on the ledge in the Narthex, you will find Altar Flower Ordering Envelopes. On the envelope you will find an area to enter who is ordering the flowers, who they are in honor or memory of and the worship service date that you would like them. Please include your payment, currently \$25, and place in the Office Manager's mailbox, outside of the Office. Please **do not** place the envelope in the offering plate and remember to take your lovely flowers home with you. Thank you!

✚ 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 which were emailed, or snail mailed.

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.

If you are interested in participating or supporting the Crop Hunger Walk (one of America's oldest and main hunger walks) this year, please contact Karen McIlroy at 734.426.6372 or after church on Sunday.

Another way you can help support the Crop Hunger Walk is by purchasing food at Aubree's on September 17th. They have agreed to donate 20% of their sales that day to Crop Walk. Please bring the attached flyer (also available on the Sanctuary table) with you when you purchase food that day (eat-in or carry-out).