

Hymn

Hymn of Promise (UMH, 707)

In the bulb there is a flower; in the seed an apple tree;
in cocoons a hidden promise: butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

There's a song in every silence, seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness, bringing hope to you and me,
From the past will come the future; what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

In our end tis our beginning; in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing, in our life, eternity.
In our death a resurrection; at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.

-Natalie Sleeth, 1986

Benediction:

No matter on what soil the seeds of God's word may fall, it will always bear fruit. Regardless of the soil we are today, as God's word falls upon us we may become good soil which bears the fruit of God's Kingdom. Amen.

Response: *God Be With You till We Meet Again (UMH 673)*

God be with you till we meet again;
by his counsels guide, uphold you,
with his sheep securely fold you;
God be with you till we meet again.

Matthew 13: 1-9, 18-23

This parable is probably one of the more familiar parables of Jesus. It is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. A sower goes out to sow seeds. As you know, sowing differs from planting in that when you sow seeds you throw them out, and they land where they may, unlike planting where the seeds are placed in the ground at a specific spot.

The tendency is to focus on the soil upon which the seeds land, some on the path which get eaten by birds, some on rocky ground where they did not establish deep roots, some upon thorns and were choked out, and some landed on good soil and brought forth fruit. We tend to focus on the allegorical interpretation given in 18-23 and ask ourselves, what type of soil are we? Are we the hard path, that hears the word and does not understand so we fall prey to the evil one who snatches it away from us? Are we rocky ground who hears and receives but does not go deeper, letting our faith remain shallow so that it withers and fades? Are we thorny ground, letting the lures and worries of the world choke out the word? Hopefully, we are good soil that bears fruit for God's kingdom, not only us as individuals but also us as a church.

But perhaps we are missing a big part of the message of this parable as we focus only on the soil. In the interpretation of the parable, Jesus identifies the seeds as the "word of the kingdom." Of course, he is talking about the message of God's kingdom, God's rule. Note that the harvest, in spite of where the seeds fell, was abundant, 100 times, 60 times, 30 times! That was incredible!

The average harvest of grain in ancient Palestine would have been 4-10 times. If you sowed 100 seeds, you would get on average 400 – 1000 kernels of grain. A harvest of 15 times or 1,500, would be excellent, worth celebrating. A harvest of 30 times or 3,000, would be fantastic. A harvest of 60 times or 6,000, would be incredibly mind boggling. A harvest of 100 times or 10,000, well that would be impossible. Yet Matthew begins reporting a harvest of this impossible number. Matthew begins with a simple human act, sowing seeds, and ends with what is humanly impossible.

What makes this impossibly abundant harvest even more incredible is that 75% of the soil produced little, if any, fruit. This impossibly abundant harvest came from only 25% of the soil.

How did this impossibly abundant harvest happen? Did the sower carefully make sure that all the seeds fell on good soil? No, the sower just threw the seeds out there and let the seeds land where they may.

Did the sower sweep the seeds off the path and onto good soil? No, he or she just let them lie on the path. The sower didn't try to shoo the birds away but let the birds have what they could get.

Did the sower try to transplant the seeds that fell on rocky soil to good soil when they came up? No, he or she just let them wither away.

Did the sower cut back the thorns so that the seeds would grow? Once again, the answer is no, he or she just let the thorns choke them out.

Did the sower fertilize the soil? No, the parable does not indicate that the sower did anything. All the sower did was throw out the seeds.

Now I know that all you gardeners out there are saying no way. There is no way that you could just throw out seeds willy-nilly and get a harvest of a hundred-fold. You would be doing great just to get a four-fold harvest. To get a hundred-fold you would need to till the soil first. Then you would fertilize and possibly put out some preemergent. Then carefully sow your seeds on the soil that you prepared. You would water and carefully hoe and pull every weed. You would put up a scarecrow to keep the birds away. You would work so hard in your garden, but even then, to get a hundred-fold return would be nearly impossible. But the sower did none of these things. He or she simply threw out seeds willy-nilly.

The seeds in this parable were not just any old wheat or barley seeds, these were the word of the Kingdom of God. There was nothing that the sower could do to produce fruit, particularly the type of impossibly abundant harvest in the parable. The actor in making this impossibly abundant harvest was GOD. It was God that produced the impossibly abundant harvest.

It is God that produces fruit for the kingdom. It is God that produces fruit within us. It is God that produces fruit here at Trinity. We hear and receive the word of God's kingdom then God produces the fruit.

But going from hearing the word to the impossibly abundant harvest is not straight and without problems. There are times when we may not understand God's word, not just understanding a Biblical text but understanding what God is wanting from us. God doesn't send a nice clear phone call, or text, or email saying this is what I want you to do today. This is what I want you to do to bear fruit for my kingdom. God doesn't give clear, simple answers for what we are to do to produce fruit for the kingdom as a church. We become like the path. We may hear the word but it is not clear and understandable. We get impatient and we go ahead and do what we think we need to do to bear fruit rather than waiting for God, and our harvest is meager. We at times as individuals and as the church have been the hard path that didn't understand what God wanted. So, we are snatched away from God's kingdom, God's rule and try to go by our rule.

We may hear God's word and become so excited and impassioned that we feel that we can do anything! We get excited about the latest church growth program. But we don't keep up our disciplines. We keep our faith limited to what we learned as a child in Sunday School. We like hearing sermons and lessons that tell us that we are blessed but not those that challenge us. We don't let our relationship with God grow and become more intimate. And our faith may wither and fade over time. We become rocky and don't allow God's word to take firm root within us or we don't let God's word guide the life of the church.

We may hear and understand God's word, God's call for us. We may be fully working on building our relationship with God but things happen. Life just happens. The kids have soccer tournaments on weekends. There are social obligations. People get sick and need to be taken care of so we lose contact with the church. Sometimes life gets so hectic and busy that we just need to take a break from it all and sleep in. Sometimes we may get to where we enjoy the activities and fellowship of the church, so we want fun things to attract people and we forget our business is to make disciples, not just church members.

Yes, we all at times have been hard ground and gotten snatched away. We all at times have been shallow in our faith and let it wither. We all have been so

overwhelmed with the cares and stresses of the world that our working for God's kingdom gets choked off. We all at times have been poor soil. Even as the church there have been times when we may have been poor soil. When we have failed to be the body of Christ and have just become another institution, another building.

But in the end God will still produce an impossibly abundant harvest. The victory of God's kingdom is sure. God will turn us into good soil that produces abundant fruit for God's kingdom. Fruit of the Spirit which Paul enumerates in Galatians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The impossibly abundant harvest of the fruit of God's spirit will happen. We will be filled with the Spirit and live according to God's rule, God's guidance in our lives, individually and as the church producing the fruit of the Spirit.

So, what do we do to make this impossible abundant harvest happen? How do we make an abundant harvest for God? We do what the sower did. We scatter seeds.

We scatter seeds of love. We scatter seeds of joy. We scatter seeds of peace. We scatter seeds of patience. We scatter seeds of kindness. We scatter seeds of generosity. We scatter seeds of faithfulness. We scatter seeds of gentleness. We scatter seeds of self-control. We scatter the seeds, individually, and as the church.

Then we do nothing. We get out of the way, letting go of our ideas, our thoughts, our plans and watch as God bears fruit in our lives and in the life of the church, here at Trinity and throughout the world.

That's how you have an abundant harvest. You let God do it. You let God work in your life and in the life of the church.



1201 Mohawk Drive
West Columbia, SC 29169
(803) 794-7777

John D. Jordan
Pastor

July 9, 2020

Dear Trinity Family,

The Church Council met Wednesday, July 1, for the purpose of establishing protocols for restarting in-person worship. These include preparation of the buildings, which parts of the facility will be open, entering and exiting procedures, seating arrangements and the service itself. These protocols are enclosed/attached for you to read. We hope that these will enable us to return to in-person worship as safely as possible and ask that you follow these diligently when we restart. If you have any questions about these protocols, please call or email me for clarification.

Church in this COVID-19 world we are in will be very different. The service will be shorter with no congregational singing or recitation of prayers and creeds. The service will continue to be along the lines of what we are doing now online. We will continue to send the order of worship and sermon for those who are not comfortable returning at this time. We will continue to post on Facebook and our Website and are exploring other mediums of connecting.

As we considered establishing a date to restart, we considered the data from DHEC, the recommendations of Dr. Bell, our state epidemiologist, and the age and health of the congregation. Dr. Bell continues to recommend that church not restart until there is a two week decline in the numbers of new cases. The data shows that during the month of June the number of new cases for the state, county and our zip code has more that doubled rather than declining. Therefore, the council decided to meet every two weeks to review the data and establish a date for restart when we begin to see a downward trend.

I know that many of you want to return to worship. We want to see our church family. But we want the church to be a place of healing for ourselves, our members and our community, not a place of illness.

You may ask yourself, what can I do to speed up this process? Continue to follow the recommendations of our medical professionals. Avoid large crowds, particularly in enclosed spaces. Minimize shopping and going out. Recreate and socialize outdoors while maintaining social distancing. Wear a face covering and maintain a distance of at least a six feet from others as much as possible. Pray for the doctors and scientists that are studying this virus that they may find an effective vaccine that will be available for all people world-wide. These are the things we can do to help slow the spread of this virus so we can safely restart worshipping together again.

Shalom,

Pastor John

As we look to restart in person worship services at Trinity the following protocols have been established by the worship committee:

Preparations:

Before we restart, the sanctuary and gathering area will be sanitized. The supplies for sanitation have been obtained and this will be done the week before restart and weekly afterward.

Hand sanitation stations have been obtained and will be placed at each entrance of the gathering area. We strongly encourage use of sanitizer upon entering and exiting.

Sunday Morning:

The following areas of the facility will be open on Sunday Morning- the sanctuary, gathering area, the hallway in the tower from the Gunter Circle parking lot, and the restrooms across from the choir room. This is to lessen traffic throughout the building so there are fewer parts of the facility that will require sanitation weekly.

Access doors will be propped opened prior to the service, Exterior doors will be closed during the service and will be reopened by the usher just prior to the end of the service. This is to prevent having multiple hands opening doors in order to reduce potential for transmission of the virus by contact, so please enter through the opened doors.

Receptacles for the offering will be placed at each entrance to the gathering area. However, we continue to encourage mailing offerings or utilizing electronic giving.

We will require everyone to wear a face covering while in the buildings as this has shown to be one way in which we can prevent the spread of the virus, especially in enclosed spaces like the church building. Disposable masks will be available at each entrance.

Seating will be on every third pew and on the ends of the pews. Pews to remain vacant will be roped off as well as the center areas of the pews. There will be more space allowed on some pews for larger family units to sit together. This is to maintain social distancing of at least six feet which along with face coverings inhibit transmission of the virus especially in enclosed spaces.

The balcony will not be used for seating as the height of the balcony increases the possibility of droplets falling on others,

Chairs will be set up in the gathering area for any overflow or latecomers. We ask that the chairs in the gathering area not be moved.

We ask that you go to your seat immediately upon entering the building. After the service we ask that you remain seated until you are directed by the pastor to exit. This will be by the gathering area first, then the main floor from back to front. Please exit the building immediately. This is to minimize the possibility of people having inadvertent close contact. Close contact greatly increases the possibility of transmission of the virus as does the amount of time spent in an enclosed space. We do not want to discourage socialization but ask that you socialize outside while maintaining proper social distancing since the risk of transmission is greatly diminished outdoors.

The Service:

The service will be an abbreviated service consisting of prayers, lectionary readings and sermon. There will be musical interludes between readings to allow time for reflection, and special music, soloist or instrumentalist, before the sermon. Again, this is to minimize the amount of time spent in an enclosed space while wearing a face covering.

There will be no congregational singing or recitation of creeds and Lord's prayer. The number of droplets by which the virus is spread increases 10 times by talking and 60 times by singing. Thus, congregation recitation and singing increases the number of droplets in the air increasing the chance of transmission.

There will be no children's church or nursery provided due to the increased diligence needed for disinfecting areas especially for our most vulnerable. Children are very welcomed in the service.

We are awaiting further guidance from the Conference restart task force for ways in which we may have communion that is both safe and theologically sound.

We realize that this is very different from the way we usually have church services at Trinity. Some may find these inconvenient and possibly annoying. But our goal is to have a worship experience that is meaningful and safe trying as best we can to balance our spiritual need for gathering and the physical dangers in the midst of this pandemic. The decision for each of you regarding returning to in-person should be based on your health and your comfort level with the precautions and protocols we have developed.

Stay Home:

Please stay home if you have any of the following symptoms of CoVid19

- Fever or chills
- Cough
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Fatigue
- Muscle or body aches
- Headache
- New loss of taste or smell
- Sore throat
- Congestion or runny nose

- Nausea or vomiting
- Diarrhea

or have reason to believe that you may have been exposed to CoVid19.

We encourage you to stay home if you fall in any of these high- risk categories which have been identified by the Centers for Disease Control:

Older adults especially if over age 80

Have moderate to severe asthma

Have a compromised immune system

Have HIV

Have liver disease

Have diabetes

Have a heart condition

Have a lung disease

Have a blood disorder

Have kidney disease requiring dialysis