

ST. PAUL LUTHERAN CHURCH

P. O. Box 267, 201 Veterans Dr., Columbus, TX 78934

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July 16, 2023 Contemporary 11:05 AM

Seventh Sunday of Pentecost

Senior Pastor	Alan Kethan	<u>Home:</u> (979)-942-9060	<u>Cell:</u> (830)-708-1200
Deacon of Word and Service			Sandye Fletcher
Youth & Family Specialist			Stephanie Polasek
Congregational Chair			Donna Maas
St. Paul Christian Learning Academy Director			Briana Bedford
Secretary			Elena Holub
Custodian			Tomas Rosales
Parish Nurse Program Coordinator			DyAnn Lauzon

MISSION STATEMENT: Love God, Love Neighbor (*Luke 10:27*)

VISION STATEMENT: We will work to strengthen and grow closer in relationship to God and to one another.

- *As we enter into a sacred time and space, a friendly reminder to please set your cell phone to vibrate.*
- ***We want to welcome all of our guests today and thank you for worshiping with us. If you have any questions or would like more information regarding our services, programs, day care, or preschool programs at St. Paul, please visit our Welcome Center in the narthex immediately following our service, and an attendant will be more than happy to assist you. If this is your first time at St. Paul, we hope you will take a gift along with you. We also have a gift bag for children.***
- *Hearing Assist devices are available for those who need assistance in hearing worship service better. Please see a person in the Sound Room (Usher Room) to request the use of a device during worship.*

* This symbol indicates that the congregation is invited to stand physically or in spirit.

INTRODUCTION

God's word is like the rain that waters the earth and brings forth vegetation. It is also like the sower who scatters seed indiscriminately. Our lives are like seeds sown in the earth. Even from what appears to be little, dormant, or dead, God promises a harvest. At the Lord's table we are fed with the bread of life, that we may bear fruit in the world.

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

SIGNING OF ATTENDANCE PADS

(Ushers will be handing out Attendance Pads during the announcements. Please be sure to sign your name and contact information.)

60 SECONDS OF STEWARDSHIP – Fellowship Team

* **CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS**

P We believe that the Bible contains instruction for us as followers of Jesus Christ to do what he asked of us. He taught the first disciples to help others to confess their sins and to proclaim to them the promise of forgiveness afterwards. So let us take a few brief moments in silence to open our hearts and minds to Jesus, to confess the things that weigh heavy on our hearts and the things we need help with so we might be more in line with what Jesus commands.

(Silence for private confession.)

P If you are truly sorry and asking God for help, here is the promise he commanded the leaders in his church to proclaim, "You are forgiven." May this forgiveness free you and help you to live; to live in Jesus' name.

C Amen.

GOSPEL SONG: REVELATION

**My life has led me down the road that's so uncertain.
Now I am left alone and I am broken – tryin' to find my way
Tryin' to find the faith that's gone.**

**This time I know that You are holding all the answers.
I'm tired of losing hope and taking chances
On roads that never seem to be the ones that bring me home.**

CHORUS:

**Give me a revelation! Show me what to do!
'Cause I've been tryin' to find my way. I haven't got a clue.
Tell me should I stay here, or do I need to move?
Give me a revelation! I've got nothing without You.
I've got nothing without You.**

GOSPEL: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus and his disciples "sow the seed" of God's word by proclaiming the good news that "the kingdom of heaven is near." Now, in a memorable parable, Jesus explains why this good news produces different results in those who hear.

A The holy gospel according to St. Matthew, chapter 13, verses 1-9 and 18-23.

¹That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ²Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹Let anyone with ears listen!" ¹⁸"Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path. ²⁰As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away. ²²As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing. ²³But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty."

GOSPEL SONG: REVELATION

**My life has led me down this path that's ever-winding.
Through every twist and turn I'm always finding – that I am lost again.
Tell me when this road will ever end.**

CHORUS:

**Give me a revelation! Show me what to do!
'Cause I've been tryin' to find my way. I haven't got a clue.
Tell me should I stay here, or do I need to move?
Give me a revelation! I've got nothing without You.
I've got nothing without. . .**

BRIDGE:

**I don't know where I can turn. Tell me, when will I learn?
Won't you show me where I need to go?
Oh. . . let me follow Your lead.
I know that it's the only way that I can get back home, OH!**

LAST CHORUS:

**Give me a revelation! Show me what to do!
'Cause I've been tryin' to find my way. I haven't got a clue.
Tell me should I stay here, or do I need to move?
Give me a revelation! I've got nothing without You.
I've got nothing without You, no. Oh, no. Oh, no.
Oh, give me a revelation. . . Oh. . . Oh. . .
I've got nothing without You. I've got nothing without You.**

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David Carr, and Mark Lee ©2008 Consuming Fire Music CCLI Lic #1729377

CHILDREN'S SERMON

SERMON

*** SERMON SONG: RECKLESS LOVE
Before I spoke a word, You were singing over me.
You have been so, so good to me.
Before I took a breath, You breathed Your life in me.
You have been so, so kind to me.**

CHORUS:

**Oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God!
Oh, it chases me down, fights 'til I'm found, leaves the ninety-nine.
I couldn't earn it; I don't deserve it, still You give yourself away.
Oh, the overwhelming, never ending, reckless love of God!**

**When I was Your foe, still Your love fought for me.
You have been so, so good to me.
When I felt no worth, You paid it all for me.
You have been so, so kind to me. CHORUS**

BRIDGE: x2

**There's no shadow You won't light up,
Mountain You won't climb up, comin' after me.
There's no wall you won't kick down,
Lie You won't tear down, coming after me.**

CHORUS

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* **APOSTLES' CREED**

A With the whole church, let us confess our faith.

C I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.

**I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.**

**I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

(The congregation may be seated during the prayers.)

PRAYERS

A Confident that God receives our joys and concerns, let us offer our prayers for the church, those in need, and all of creation.

A brief silence.

A Guide your church, O God, to sow seeds of forgiveness and righteousness on good soil. Direct your people to proclaim your love in this congregation and throughout the world.

A brief silence.

A Sustain your creation, O God, by sending favorable weather, causing trees and fields to grow. If it be your will, we ask you to bring us rain.

A brief silence.

A We pray for peace in all the world, especially in war-torn areas of Ukraine and Sudan. Bring an end to wars and the destruction of lives and your creation.

A brief silence.

A We pray for the family and friends of Sharon Hanzelka who passed away this past week. Be with them and comfort them during this difficult time.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those in need of healing and whose needs are diverse and known to you including:
Ronnie Huebel; Rose Goebel; Dorothy Wicke; George King; Madelyn Braden; Arlin Brune; those on our Prayer Team's list; and those we name in our hearts before you.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those battling cancer that they may know comfort and strength. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*

Pam Parker; Debbie Herzik; Randy Wendt; Susan Chandler; Heather Deviney; Jaime Sawyer; Kim Moerbe Weltnack; Misti Retzer; Zelda Lanford; Michelle Thraen; Pauline Gosnell; Nina Naumann; GayLynn Willms Burk; Carl Norton; Laura Harris; Todd Foster; Cindy Tanner; Joe Reck; Melinda Rodiek; Melda Coleman; Donna Culton; Nancy Hartmann; Lydia Rojas; Larry Stolar; Vivian Fortenberry; Rick Davis; Darryl Stancik; Jerry Ordner; Michael Yancey; Al Gene Canik; Jane Venghaus Taylor; George Wright; Sandy Mosley; Charlene Tesch; Karen Bailiff; Julian Divin; Nancy Biers; Pam Potter; Charlie Hammock; Brad Bryson; Lynette Frnka; Riana Jamison; Jenna Escamilla; Margaret Ortiz; Keith Korth; Jodi Sebesta; Cathy Siglow; Paul Casinger; DeQuincy Lister; Lily Presswood; Denise Lange; Doug Mason; Dr. Tom Hancher; Joe Berry; Gracie Brune; Margaret Rogers; Leonard Kahlden; Curtis Wallin; Megan Burch; Lisa Grazier; Phyllis Behrend; Jessica Mauchlen; Donna Tiner; Libby Divin; Diane Brooks; Bob Loy; Stanley King; Dawn Foster; Edward Halcolm; Amber Smith Kutach; Louis Camacho; Melvin Schobel; Janet Greene; Sabrina Galindo; Debbie Grimes; Horst Traub; Margie Fisk; Preston Carter; Penny Miller; Carl Hahn; Megan Cain; Amanda Fuchs; Cyndi Wallace; Karen Broussard; Donna Young; Sharon Heimann; and Brenda Baker.

A We pray for all expectant mothers, and especially for:
Dina Anton de Espinoza; Olivia Leyendecker; Daya Latiolais; Cassidy Zajicek Parks; Courtney Busselman; Nancy Gorman; Camille Stancik; and Kyndall Beettner that they have healthy terms and deliveries, and if not, may they find comfort and peace.

A brief silence.

A We pray for all those who reside in care facilities and the homebound that they receive your caring and compassion. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Dr. Cecil Marburger; Joey Denby; Edwin Oevermann; Paul Minar, Sr.; Adrian Fritsch; Doug Hill; Robert Saunders; Coy Dell Schindler; Barbara McMath; Madeline Menke; Doris Horndt; Helen Perrard; Jane Booker; Pat Brasher; Dolores Hoelscher; Jesse Grabow; Ronnie Rogers; Joyce Dehmer; Donna Dehmer; Rita Noska; and Cherie Moore.

A We pray for all law enforcement officers, fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers, 9-1-1 dispatchers, and active duty military personnel that they are protected and kept safe. *(Pause for those we are praying for.)*
Law enforcement officers: Charles Jobb; Joseph Smith; Todd Jacobs; Troy Neisner; Jacob Gorman; Nancy Gorman; Johnny Kovar; Abigail Weido; Dustin Lattimore; Bruno Flores; Zane Weido; Josh Jones; as well as Donnie Templeton and Jason Templeton who are also fire fighters. For all fire fighters, first responders, healthcare workers and 9-1-1 dispatchers, especially Brent Gorman, Sr.; Brent Gorman, Jr.; Reid Brasher; Dusty Dittmar; John Maertz; Ron Luedke; Pastor Alan Kethan; Kristi Weyand; Eric Weyand; Bradley Berger; Jon Berger; James Chollett; Edward Thraen, Jr.; Garrett Flores; Kyle Burris; Dylan Walcik; Randy Wendt; Travis Neuendorff; Brenda Henkes; Jan Willette and Terri Neuendorff, as well as those active duty military members including Brian Anderson; Michael Graham; Bryan Kubena; Brad Bergfeld; Cody Jowers; Kyle Appelt; Montana Appelt; Douglas Neuendorff; Scott Cherniss;

Kameron Page; Ryan Neisner; Anthony D'Angelo; Dalton Kapel; Kindra Dawson; William Phillips; Kevin Gonzalez; and Cody Goolsby.

- A We pray for the church throughout the world. May we all proclaim the good news of your love effectively. We ask, especially, that you would bless the ministry of our sister congregations Cristo Rey and Iglesia Cristiana Camino de Santidad in Peru, all Missionaries, especially St. Paul's supported missionary, Dina Anton de Espinoza, and our companion synod, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Central African Republic.

A brief silence.

- A Into your hands, O God, we commend all for whom we pray, in the name of the one who reconciled all creation to himself, Jesus Christ our Savior.

C Amen.

* **PEACE**

- P As Jesus shared peace, let us also share His peace with one another. *(Share the "Peace of the Lord" with your neighbors.)*

(We will be collecting offerings before and after worship each week. This includes Power of One dollars.)

OFFERING and POWER OF ONE

"Power of One" is a ministry sponsored by your Stewardship Team. We are asking each and every one of our members to give \$1.00 above what your normal giving would be. We are asking each member to place this \$1.00 bill or change in the offering plate each week. The team is also inviting all children to participate to develop the habit of giving as part of their worship experience. Parents, a penny, nickel, dime, quarter, or dollar bill, any of these will do to help your children develop a habit of giving. These "Power of One" dollars will be used to support local ministries and ministries abroad. The purpose of this ministry is to demonstrate that something as small as one dollar can be used to make a difference in the lives of others.

* **OFFERING PRAYER**

- P God of field and forest, sea and sky, you are the giver of all good things. Sustain us with these gifts of your creation, and multiply your graciousness in us with what we give back to your work, that the world may be fed with your love, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

* **REMEMBERING JESUS' WORDS, PROMISES, AND COMMANDS**

* **LORD'S PRAYER**

- P Lord remember us in your kingdom and teach us to pray.

**C 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.**

* **INVITATION TO COMMUNION**

- P All people are called to Christ's table. Come and receive that which will grow in you.

C Amen.

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMUNION (Continuous with Individual Cups)

{Distribution will be continuous. All are welcome for communion. Please come down the center aisle starting from the front. Follow directions of the ushers, coming up one side at a time. Pastor will hand you the bread. If you wish to have a gluten-free wafer, please tell Pastor "Gluten-free, please." Afterward, you will choose either wine or white grape juice from the individual cups in the tray – white grape juice in the center with wine surrounding. Place the empty cups in the baskets located off to the side. Although communion is continuous, you are welcome to kneel at the rail in prayer after receiving communion. Please return to your seat by the side aisles.}

* **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

- P We thank you, generous God, for the refreshment we have received at your banquet table. Send us now to spread your generosity into all the world, through the one who is our dearest treasure, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

C Amen.

* **BLESSING**

- P The God who calls across the cosmos and speaks in the smallest seed ☩ bless, keep, and sustain you now and to the end of the age.

C Amen.

* **CLOSING SONG: NEW CREATION**

Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh oh. . .

Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh. . .

**I thought I knew what I was talkin' about, when I testified of Your great love.
Well I was a soul on fire, there was no doubt.
Bible-believin', saved, and washed in the blood.
But it wasn't 'til I stumbled, and made my mistakes
That I could know in my soul how amazing is grace!**

CHORUS:

*You brought me blessings out of a tragedy.
You turned my old song into a symphony.
And with Your spirit living inside of me,
I'm a new creation! I'm a new creation!*

**And now I know what You were talkin' about.
Went from my head into my heart.
When I was broken at the bottom I found,
You're my Healer and Redeemer, Jesus, that's who You are!** **CHORUS**

Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh oh. . .
Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh. . .
**Well it wasn't 'til I stumbled, and made my mistakes
That I could know in my soul how amazing is grace!**

LAST CHORUS:

*You brought me blessings out of a tragedy.
You turned my old song into a symphony.
And with Your spirit living inside of me,
I'm a new creation! Oh, oh oh oh. . .*

*You brought me blessings out of a tragedy.
You turned my old song into a symphony.
And with Your spirit living inside of me,
I'm a new creation! I'm a new creation!*

Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh oh. . .
Oh, oh oh. . . Oh, oh. . .

**And with Your spirit living inside of me,
I'm a new creation! I'm a new creation!**

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*** DISMISSAL**

P Go in peace. You are good seed.

C Thanks be to God, and we will.

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USHERS: Mike & Gerri Hackfeld; Sandi Roensch

LAY READER: Mia Post

STREAMING: Kay Wesson

SOUND: Todd Jacobs

ACOLYTE: Elliot Polasek

POWER POINT: Dinah Jacobs

ALTAR GUILD: Barbara Brisco

WELCOME: The psalmist proclaims that God's word is a lamp for our feet (Psalm 119:105). May you experience the light of God's guidance on your path today. Welcome to worship.

ALTAR FLOWERS are placed by Nelda Hajdik in loving memory of her husband Leroy whose birthday was July 12.

Thank you! Sandye and I would like to express our sincere thanks to all who sent flowers, cards and prayers for our family during the passing of my mother, Alma Lee Fletcher, recently. She lived a long life and will be missed by her family and friends. Thank you all, *Randy and Sandye Fletcher*

COLLECTION OF OFFERING: Offering for the worship services is collected before and after worship. Offering bowls are placed in the back entrance and inside the side sanctuary door for you to place your offering in. This includes "Power of One" dollars.

Amount needed for average weekly budgeted expenses: \$8,405.00

Attendance: July 8 & 9, 2023 – 157

Power of One: July 8 & 9, 2023 – \$35.00

Contributions: July 8 & 9 – \$8,862.56

Building Fund: July 8 & 9 – \$423.23

Thank you to those who contributed to last week's offerings. Loving God/Loving Neighbor.

ATTENTION: *Names on the prayer list in the bulletin will be printed for 2 weeks. After 2 weeks, the names will be removed from the bulletin unless the church office has been notified to keep them.*

► **Children's Activity Bags** are available for use by our young members and guests! You can find them on the coat hooks in the coat area of the narthex. **After worship, please place the used activity bags and their contents in the receptacle in the narthex.**

Thank you! ☺



Attention Graduating Seniors and Current College Students: This is a reminder that if you are planning to or are currently pursuing a degree in education *or* nursing, you are encouraged to apply for the Frank & Ann Derr Scholarship here at St. Paul. For an application, please see Ms. Stephanie or stop by the church office. Complete your application and return it to the church office **as soon as possible.**

**** Colorado County Senior Connections ** –**

A place for Seniors, 65 years and older, to socialize with others.

The group meets at the Stafford Opera House – Columbus in the Buddy Rau Room from **10:00 AM-1:00 PM** the **1st and 3rd Wednesdays of the month**. Lunch will be provided. Various activities will include: Card games/board games; Bingo; Movies; Educational Speakers; Field trips; and Social gathering time!



Fresh Produce Distribution for the Columbus Community: St. Paul has an opportunity to serve our community by being the distribution site for boxes of fresh produce. This produce will be provided at no cost by The Common Market using grant money obtained by Methodist Healthcare Ministries. The Columbus Food Pantry will no longer provide any fresh produce, so, this may be the only chance for many families in our community to have access to some fresh, healthy foods. The boxes of produce will be delivered to us twice a month. **We would like to distribute the boxes of produce to families on the 1st and 3rd Saturday of each month from 8:00-10:00 AM at The Lighthouse. We are looking for volunteers to help with this distribution. If you would be interested in joining this community outreach team, please sign up in the narthex (foyer). If you have any questions, please contact Kay Wesson at 713-851-6282.**



Newman's Castle for 2nd & 3rd Graders! St. Paul students entering 2nd and 3rd grade this fall are invited to experience Newman's Castle in Bellville, Texas. On **Tuesday, July 25, 2023 we will leave** the church parking lot **at 9:30 AM and return by 2:30 PM**. After exploring the castle and cataput, students will be served lunch and hear the story of Queen Esther. Please RSVP to Stephanie by Monday, July 17, 2023 at 979-732-1858.

♣ **Day Camp at Lutherhill!** Youth completing K-5th grade are invited to experience a week at camp without the over-night stay during the week of **July 30-August 4, 2023**. Camp starts each day at 8:00 AM and will end at 5:15 PM. Stephanie Polasek will shuttle youth each day to and from camp. We will leave the church at 7:20 AM and will return at 5:50 PM. **Cost is \$195 for the week**. Register online at lutherhill.org and then contact Stephanie at 979-732-1858 for transportation. It's always a great time for the kiddos!



ST. PAUL SENIOR EXPLORERS ARE GOING TO THE ASTROS! The Astros will be playing the Boston Red Sox on **Thursday, August 24, 2023**. Game time is 1:10 PM. We will **depart St. Paul at 10:00 AM**, stop and eat brunch at Cracker Barrel, and arrive comfortably at Minute Maid Park before game time. The grey area is that we think we can get pretty good tickets for \$30-\$50, depending on how many are going and the Astros' performance. We will call everyone before buying tickets if they are going to cost more than that. Please sign up in the narthex (foyer) by Sunday, August 13, 2023. Call Kevin Page with any questions at 979-732-0845.

♥ **Grief Support Group:** Are you experiencing grief from the loss of a loved one, loss of a job, loss of friend who has moved? The Grief Support Group is a place to share and discuss these issues with other individuals. The group meets the **third Thursday of each month from 5:30-6:30 PM in the church library**. For questions or more information, contact Peggy Geisler at 979-732-0350.

SCHEDULE FOR THE WEEK:

July 17-19 – High School Beach Retreat
Mon., July 17 – 9:30 AM – Staff Meeting
1:00 PM – Deacon Sandye to TLC
6:00 PM – Church Council
Tues., July 18 – 10:00 AM – Pastor Alan to Columbus Oaks
12:00 PM – Noon Bible Study (library)
5:30 PM – Prayer Team (library)
Wed., July 19 – **Newsletter Deadline!!**
9:00 AM – CLA Chapel
9:00 AM – Morning Circle (library)
5:30 PM – Grief Support Group (library)
Thurs., July 20 – 10:30 AM – Adult Bible Study (library)
Fri., July 21 – 7:00 PM – Holy Communion Worship
Sat., July 22 – 9:00 AM – Holy Communion Worship
Next Sun., July 23 – 10:00 AM – Adult Sunday School
11:05 AM – Holy Communion Contemporary Worship

UPCOMING COMMEMORATIONS

Monday, July 17, 2023 Bartolomé de Las Casas, missionary to the Indies, died 1566
A native of Spain, Las Casas first came to the Western hemisphere while serving in the military. Upon arriving in the West, Las Casas was granted a large estate with Indigenous enslaved people whom he freed after he was ordained a priest. He worked in the Caribbean and Central America to improve the lives of the native peoples.

Saturday, July 22, 2023 Mary Magdalene, Apostle
Sometimes called "the apostle to the apostles" because she told them of her encounter with the risen Lord, Mary was a woman of Galilee who followed Jesus throughout his ministry. She was present at Jesus' crucifixion and his burial.

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OTHER READINGS: Isaiah 55:10-13
God's word to Israel's exiles is as sure and effective as never-failing precipitation. Their return to the Holy Land in a new exodus is cheered on by singing mountains and by trees that clap their hands.

The reading begins:

¹⁰For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it. ¹²For you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall burst into song, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. ¹³Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall be to the LORD for a memorial, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

PSALM: Psalm 65:[1-8] 9-13

[¹You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; to you shall vows be fulfilled. ²To you, the one who answers prayer, to you all flesh shall come. ³Our sins are stronger than we are, but you blot out our transgressions. ⁴Happy are they whom you choose and draw to your courts to dwell there! They will be satisfied by the beauty of your house, by the holiness of your temple. ⁵Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness, O God of our salvation, O hope of all the ends of the earth and of the oceans far away. ⁶You make firm the mountains by your power; you are girded about with might. ⁷You still the roaring of the seas, the roaring of their waves, and the clamor of the peoples. ⁸Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.] ⁹You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous; the river of God is full of water. You prepare the grain, for so you provide for the earth. ¹⁰You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase. ¹¹You crown the year with your goodness, and your paths overflow with plenty. ¹²May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, and the hills be clothed with joy. ¹³May the meadows cover themselves with flocks, and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; let them shout for joy and sing.

OTHER READINGS: Romans 8:1-11

There is no condemnation for those who live in Christ. God sent Christ to accomplish what the law was unable to do: condemn sin and free us from its death-dealing ways. The Spirit now empowers proper actions and values in our lives and gives us the promise of resurrected life.

The reading begins:

¹There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ²For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. ³For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. ⁵For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. ⁶To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law — indeed it cannot, ⁸and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since

the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

SERVICE OVERVIEW: LIFE IN EVERY DIRECTION

We can identify death in every direction. We see war, hunger, addiction, poverty, a dying planet, and broken hearts. This is not a new story. The children of Israel surely saw death in every direction, wandering in the desert and at least occasionally wondering about their next meal. Paul looks at his own life and, at first, sees nothing beyond spiritual death. He reminds us that death is not just physical, but also spiritual. Then, in the parable of the sower, three-fourths of the seeds die and three-fourths of the sections of the field are inhospitable to flourishing life. Sometimes, life isn't even given a chance. We might look at the world and ourselves and only see the places that are absent and inhospitable to God's love.

The parable of the sower elicits reflection, repentance, and, ultimately, new life from its readers and hearers in considering the sort of spiritual life they practice. Are we hospitable or inhospitable to God's word? This parable is a vivid reminder of all God has overcome - rocks, scorching sun, thorns, and snatching - to bring life to the world. God brings forth life in places where people see only death.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION:

Today's parable likens the word of God to seed that Christ sows into the field that we are, honoring the preaching of the word and encouraging right and fruitful reception of that word. Welcome to worship! Receive the seed of the word. At the table, be nourished for a fruitful life.

Parables are like riddles: they challenge us to think in unconventional ways and to explore possibilities outside of our usual way of thinking. Jesus uses parables to invite us to expand views and consider possibilities about the kingdom of heaven that are beyond our familiar and comfortable perspectives.

The church often operates out of a sense of frugality; However, there is no frugality in the action of the seed sower in today's parable! The sower throws the seed with a devil-may-care extravagance, scattering the seed in every direction without attention to whether the seed is falling on the prepared soil or not. What are the implications of that kind of missional extravagance?

The imagery of growth recurs throughout the Bible, and today we are asked to consider the seed and the different growing environments as our ever-changing and varying levels of commitment. The man represents God and the seed is God's message. Just as a planted seed begins to grow, the Word starts to deepen and grow within us. A crop is produced in our lives by living as the word of God teaches. We all have different abilities and talents, and we use what

we've been given. Just as it takes time for a crop to grow from seed, it will take time for us to develop the fruits we will produce.

KID STUDY:

Just like the seeds in today's story, God's gifts multiply. The cold weather we get in the winter helps to produce good fruit in the spring. Rain gives life, and is especially welcome during the dry seasons just like last week's welcome showers. A seed, good soil, and water produce what we need to live. God also provides lots of other good things that give us what we need to live: family that provides love and safety, health that provides the strength to do fun things, a brain that learns. God's gifts provide more than one thing but multiply in their goodness.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

*Beginners in prayer are those who draw the water from the well. This is very hard work, for it will fatigue them to keep their sense recollected, which is extremely difficult because they have been accustomed to a life of distraction. God grant that there may be water in the well! But that, at least, does not depend on us: our task is to draw it and to do what we can to water the flowers. What, then, will a person do who finds for many days nothing but aridity, dislike, and distaste? The gardener will rejoice and take new heart and consider it the greatest of favors to work in the garden of so great an Emperor. Let not the gardener wish to have God's kingdom on earth or ever cease from prayer, but rather resolve, even if this aridity should persist a whole life long, not to let Christ fall with his cross. - Teresa of Ávila [Teresa of Ávila, in *The Mystics of Spain*, ed. Allison Peers (London: Allen and Unwin, 1951), 81-83.]*

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Next Week's Theme (July 22 & 23): Parable of the weeds in the field

Next Week's Scriptures (July 22 & 23):

First Reading: Isaiah 44:6-8

"There is no other God than the LORD."

Psalm: Psalm 86:11-17

"Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth." (Ps. 86:11)

Second Reading: Romans 8:12-25

"The revealing of the children of God."

Gospel: Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43

"The parable of the weeds."