



# SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

July 12, 2020

*We are still the body of Christ even though we are unable to gather for public worship during this time of world-wide crisis. While we cannot be together in person around our Lord's Table, we can hear the word of God and hold each other in prayer.*

*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. In the word, we are fed with the bread of life, that we may bear fruit in the world.*

*Today is the Commemoration of Swedish theologian, ecumenist, and social activist Nathan Söderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, who died in 1931. The first clergyman ever to receive the honor, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to unite peoples after the First World War. Söderblom also called attention to the revival of worship principles used in the early centuries of the Church, and helped establish the groundwork for the World Council of Churches.*

## Prelude

## Toccata in A Major

Dieterich Buxtehude  
(1637-1707)

## Hymn

### Open Now Thy Gates of Beauty



1 O - pen now thy gates of beau - ty, Zi - on, let me en - ter there,  
2 Gra - cious God, I come be - fore thee; come thou al - so un - to me;  
3 Here thy praise is glad - ly chant-ed, here thy seed is du - ly sown;  
4 Thou my faith in - crease and quick-en, let me keep thy gift di - vine;  
5 Speak, O God, and I will hear thee, let thy will be done in - deed;



where my soul in joy - ful du - ty waits for God who an - swers prayer.  
where we find thee and a - dore thee, there a heav'n on earth must be.  
let my soul, where it is plant-ed, bring forth pre - cious sheaves a - lone,  
how - so - e'er temp - ta - tions thick-en, may thy word still o'er me shine  
may I un - dis - turbed draw near thee while thou dost thy peo - ple feed.



Oh, how bless-ed is this place, filled with so - lace, light, and grace!  
To my heart, oh, en - ter thou, let it be thy tem - ple now!  
so that all I hear may be fruit - ful un - to life in me.  
as my guid-ing star through life, as my com - fort in all strife.  
Here of life the foun - tain flows; here is balm for all our woes.

## Apostolic Greeting

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

## Prayer of the Day

*Almighty God, we thank you for planting in us the seed of your word. By your Holy Spirit help us to receive it with joy, live according to it, and grow in faith and hope and love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen*

## WE GATHER AROUND THE WORD AND PRAYERS

### First Lesson - Isaiah 55:10–13

*God's word to Israel's exiles is as sure and effective as never-failing precipitation.  
Their return to their homeland in a new exodus is cheered on by singing mountains and by trees that clap their hands.*

- <sup>10</sup>For 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,  
<sup>11</sup>so 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.  
<sup>12</sup>For 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.  
<sup>13</sup>Instead 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 65:9-14

*This is a psalm of praise and thanksgiving to the savior, the mighty Lord,  
who creates the earth and causes it to bring forth abundantly.*

- <sup>9</sup>You visit the earth and water it abundantly; you make it very plenteous;  
the river of God is full of water.  
<sup>10</sup>You prepare the grain,  
for so you provide for the earth.  
<sup>11</sup>You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges;  
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.  
<sup>12</sup>You crown the year with your goodness,  
and your paths overflow with plenty.  
<sup>13</sup>May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing,  
and the hills be clothed with joy.

<sup>14</sup>May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,  
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain;  
let them shout for joy and sing.

## Second Lesson - Romans 8:1–11

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

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup>For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. <sup>3</sup>For 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, <sup>4</sup>so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For 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. <sup>6</sup>To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For 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, <sup>8</sup>and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

<sup>9</sup>But 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. <sup>10</sup>But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. <sup>11</sup>If 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.

## Holy Gospel - Matthew 13:1–9, 18–23

*In Matthew's gospel, both Jesus of Nazareth 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 illustrates the extravagant nature of God and how surprisingly fruitful God's power can be.*



That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup>Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. <sup>6</sup>But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>Let anyone with ears listen!

<sup>18</sup>Hear then the parable of the sower. <sup>19</sup>When 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. <sup>20</sup>As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; <sup>21</sup>yet 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. <sup>22</sup>As 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. <sup>23</sup>But 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."



## Sermon

The evocative scene unfolded at a gas station just outside of Selma, Alabama. A visitor to the area stopped to refuel, and headed inside to pay. Sitting in a chair against the front wall by the entrance was an elderly African-American man who gestured to the surrounding farm fields and called out to the

traveler, “Boss, forty cents a day I plowed those fields. Forty cents a day!” After repeating himself in a louder voice, the man pulled out his wallet, removed two one-dollar bills, and waved them in the air. “This was five days of my life, boss. Forty cents a day. Forty cents a day!”

Such brief encounters make one wonder about the life stories of other people – what they have experienced, on what ground they have walked. One can imagine this wizened Alabama man having walked the hard-packed path of prejudice, a path where not much grew, where life and opportunities were too quickly snatched away. This man knew what it was like to live between a rock and hard place. On rocky ground, life withers because roots can’t be put down. There’s no security or stability and the sun scorches. One can imagine this man having walked among the thorns of violence, fear, anger, and poverty – thorns that wrapped themselves around him and his family, choking away dignity, security, and trust. One can hope that the best ground that he had walked upon in his long life was not the forty-cents-a-day soil that he had plowed, but rather that there was some dark, rich soil along the way that nourished life, love, and hope.

One does not have to plow fields for forty cents a day, or be a farmer or gardener, to know the different landscapes of which Jesus of Nazareth speaks in today’s gospel reading. We know the beaten paths of life, the rocky patches of life, the scratches and cuts from the stifling thorns of life, and, we hope, **ALSO** the sacred soil of life that feeds and nourishes us. Here, in a parable meant to read **US**, Jesus isn’t merely describing different types of soil or circumstances of life. He is describing our inner geography. These are the various landscapes of the human heart that we discover in ourselves and meet in others. However, the kind of dirt we may be **ISN’T** the focal point of this parable because, truth be told, we are **ALL FOUR** types of soil, commingled.

Instead, we need to pay attention to the **SOWER** in the story in order to make sense of the parable and hear the point. What a sower he is because of what he does – tossing seeds about indiscriminately. This makes no sense in our world of modern agribusiness in which high-tech, satellite-data-enhanced farm tractors plant seeds, taking into account soil types, soil fertility, moisture levels, yield histories, and other factors. To our way of thinking, the sower in today’s story would flunk Farming 101 or Master Gardening 101 for this wasteful, inefficient, ineffective way of planting seeds – tossing them on a hardened pathway, and on rocky ground, and among the choking thorns.

However, we must keep in mind that Jesus’ parables are meant to offer a *different* perspective, a *new* worldview. They give us a glimpse into **GOD’S** world and what God is like. They heal our ears and our eyes so that we might hear and understand, see and perceive. Parables are not meant to test our human intelligence. They are riddles of grace that test our heart’s willingness to surrender to and be enveloped by the always-surprising generosity of God – which is exactly what the parable of the sower reveals.

As different as the four soils are in today's parable, they all share two things in common – seeds and the sower. The sower sows the same seeds in all four soils with equal **TOIL**, equal **HOPE**, and equal **GENEROSITY**. The sower does so without evaluating the soil's quality or potential. While we may want to judge what kind of dirt we are – or, more likely, judge others – this story is not about the quality of the dirt. It's about the quality of God, the divine sower, who simply wants to sow the abundance of God's Word, of God's grace, of God's love, of God's forgiveness in our lives. Whether we are forty-cents-a-day soil or \$400-a-day soil, no life, no person, no soil is left unsown.

The parable of the sower is about God's faithfulness and the power of **GOD** to bring forth an abundant, manyfold harvest of the fruits of mercy and justice, compassion and forgiveness. God loves us and showers us with grace in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus of Nazareth went to his death on a cross to show us the profound love God has for us – the love in which we are baptized, the love we are sent forth to show others. The parable of the sower calls **US** to sow seeds of grace and mercy in our daily lives, worrying not about where the seeds will land but rather seeing to it that we are casting as much love as possible.

This parable takes on new meaning when one thinks about the elderly African-American man outside Selma, and then considers our own time of pandemic, growing economic disparities, of racism, of violence and unrest. What about those individuals and communities that cannot grow, or pursue their dreams, or realize their full potential because they are excluded and fall by the wayside, their opportunities gobbled up by predators? What about those who lack access to sufficient resources and fall on rocky soil? What about those who are stifled by oppressive structures and choked by thorns of brutality and dehumanizing economic forces?

Every part of our lives, every soil within us, has been sown with the seeds of God's love. Because God loves us, we are empowered to love and serve our neighbor. Because God loves us, we are empowered to stand against the fear and scarcity that drive prejudice, racism, greed, and violence in our world. Because God loves us, we are empowered to strive for the equality and dignity of all people. Because God loves us, we are empowered to share generously of what we have so that all God's children will have enough. Because God loves us and knows we are still works in progress, we are empowered to grow into being more fully the people God has created and redeemed us to be.

Seeds here. Seeds there. Seeds everywhere. Given the right conditions, apple seeds become apples. Spinach seeds become spinach. "God seeds" become God's love in the world – through Jesus the Christ, and **OUR** hearts, and hands, and voices. May **WE** bear fruit many times over. Amen

## Hymn of the Day

### Almighty God, Your Word Is Cast



1 Al - might - y God, your word is cast like seed in - to the ground;  
2 Let not the sly sa - tan - ic foe this ho - ly seed re - move,  
3 Let not the world's de - ceit - ful cares the ris - ing plant de - stroy,  
4 So when the pre - cious seed is sown, your quick-'ning grace be - stow,



now let the dew of heav'n de - scend and righ - teous fruits a - bound.  
but give it root in ev - 'ry heart to bring forth fruits of love.  
but let it yield a hun - dred - fold the fruits of peace and joy.  
that all whose souls the truth re - ceive its sav - ing pow'r may know.

Text: John Cawood, 1775–1852, alt.  
Music: ST. FLAVIAN, J. Day, Psalter, 1562

## The Prayers

Called into unity with one another and the whole creation, let us pray for our shared world.

Gracious God, your word is sown in many ways and places. We pray for missionaries and newly planted congregations around the world. Inspire us by their witness to the faith we share and proclaim.

Creating God, the mountains and hills burst into song and the trees and fields clap their hands in praise. We pray for the birds and animals who make their home in the trees, and for lands stripped bare by deforestation. Empower us to restore the earth and sustainably use what you have given.

Reigning God, we pray for our nation's leaders. Increase their desire for justice and equality. We pray for our enemies. Bridge the chasms that divide us and guide authorities to a deep and lasting peace.

Abiding God, you are the generous sower who cares for all who are in need. For those for whom growth in faith is difficult, stir up renewal. For those who are worrying, provide release. For those who are struggling, ease burdens. For those in fear, give hope. For those who are sick, grant healing. Bless and strengthen our hands to do your work in the world.

Renewing God, nourish and nurture the seeds of love and mercy you have planted in this congregation, that we might grow as your disciples. Sustain our ministries and deepen relationships with the wider community.

Eternal God, we give thanks for all who have died in the faith, especially Nathan Söderblom, Bishop of Uppsala, whom we commemorate today. Comfort all who mourn, and sustain us in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

Receive these prayers, O God, and those too deep for words; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

## WE WORSHIP WITH OUR OFFERINGS

The needs of Holy Trinity's mission and ministry are ongoing during these times of upheaval and turmoil. Many of our outreach ministry partnerships are facing increased requests for services. May we be faithful and generous as we support our mission "to care actively in the name of Jesus Christ."

Offerings may be mailed to the church or dropped off at the church office.

You may also use the online giving portal on our website.

Go to [www.holytrinitylynchburg.org](http://www.holytrinitylynchburg.org) and click on "Give."

You may also download the "GivePlus Church" app for your smart phone from Apple or Google.

### Offertory Prayer

*Merciful Father, we offer with joy and thanksgiving what you have first given us – our selves, our time, and our possessions, signs of your gracious love. Receive them for the sake of him who offered himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

### Lord's Prayer

*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*

### Blessing

Almighty God, Father, ✙ Son, and Holy Spirit, bless you now and forever. Amen

### Dismissal

Our service now begins. Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

### Postlude

*Canzona in G Major*

Dieterich Buxtehude





*The altar flowers are given to the glory of God  
in honor of Carol Poftak  
on her eightieth birthday by her family.*

*The candles are given to the glory of God  
by Lisa Taylor  
with gratitude for the staff of Holy Trinity.*



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