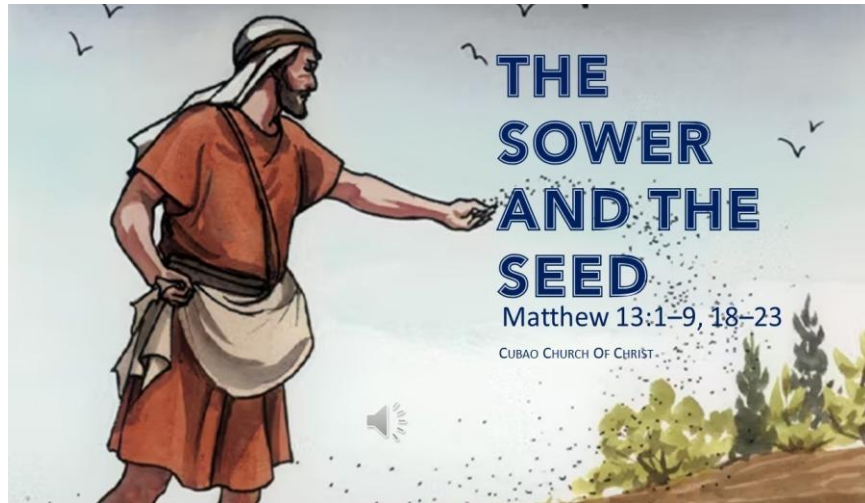


SUNDAY, JULY 12, 2026
SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST



St. John United Church of Christ

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Rev. Rosemary Captain

Organist – Sharon Banjavcic

Liturgy – Rev. Dr. Cheryl A. Lindsay

Ushers –

(NCH) New Century Hymnal CCLI LICENSE #11164431

*Please stand if comfortably able.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER CONCERNS

THE BELL IS RUNG

PRELUDE: “Marching to Zion” Anna Laura Page

PENNIES FOR MISSION Hoyelton Ministries

***RESPONSIVE CALL TO WORSHIP (inspired by Psalms 119 and 65)**

One: Praise is due to the Holy One, whose ways are the joy of our hearts.

Many: The Faithful One holds our lives and our hands. Happy are we who praise the Holy One!

One: Worship is due to the Holy One, whose revelation illuminates our path.

Many: The Just God is righteous. Happy are we who follow the Holy One!

One: Love is due to the Holy One, whose compassion, peace, and strength satisfies the prayers spoken and unspoken.

Many: The Sovereign God answers prayer. Happy are we who love the Holy One!

INVOCATION

God who gathers us together, we delight to be in community with you and one another. Let your word be proclaimed in truth. Let us burst into songs that reflect the depths of our spirits. May our prayers be formed in your name and granted by your wisdom. May we know

you, Divine Mystery, and ourselves better and deeper because we have entered your presence as a community of faithful, questioning, and hope-seeking participants in your kingdom. Amen.

***OPENING HYMN: 319 “Sing The Over Again to Me”**

***UNISON PRAYER FOR TRANSFORMATION AND NEW LIFE:**

Holy One, we incline our hearts toward you, but the concerns of the world and challenges of daily living pull us away. Keep us grounded in your promises, your purposes, your power, and your presence. Reorient us on the road of liberation, belonging, and communal care so that not only do we receive the gift of transformation, we companion with siblings, neighbors, and even enemies in your work of making all things new. Remove the misleading veil that disguises sufficiency with scarcity. Sustain us with being satisfied with enough and abundance materially while continuing to thirst for righteousness so that all may be well. In you, we hope and believe. Amen.

WORDS OF GRACE:

Beloved, rest in the assurance of Psalm 65:5, “By awesome deeds you answer us with deliverance, O God of our salvation; you are the hope of all the ends of the

earth and of the farthest seas.” The Holy One receives and responds to our prayers and offers the promise of renewed life and the power of community in the kingdom of God. Through Christ, we participate as witnesses, agents, and recipients of transformation for the glory of God and by the grace of God.

***GLORIA: Glory to the Creator, and the Christ and the Spirit so near. As it was from the start so it shall be forever, One God always here. (repeat twice) (end)
One God always here. One God always here.**

SCRIPTURE LESSONS

OLD TESTAMENT: Genesis 25:19-34

FROM “The Message”

Jacob and Esau

¹⁹⁻²⁰ This is the family tree of Isaac son of Abraham: Abraham had Isaac. Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan Aram. She was the sister of Laban the Aramean. ²¹⁻²³ Isaac prayed hard to God for his wife because she was barren. God answered his prayer and Rebekah became pregnant. But the children tumbled and kicked inside her so much that she said, “If this is the way it’s going to be, why go on living?” She went to God to find out what was going on. God told her, Two nations are in

your womb, two peoples butting heads while still in your body. One people will overpower the other, and the older will serve the younger.

²⁴⁻²⁶ When her time to give birth came, sure enough, there were twins in her womb. The first came out reddish, as if snugly wrapped in a hairy blanket; they named him Esau (Hairy). His brother followed, his fist clutched tight to Esau's heel; they named him Jacob (Heel). Isaac was sixty years old when they were born.

²⁷⁻²⁸ The boys grew up. Esau became an expert hunter, an outdoorsman. Jacob was a quiet man preferring life indoors among the tents. Isaac loved Esau because he loved his game, but Rebekah loved Jacob.

²⁹⁻³⁰ One day Jacob was cooking a stew. Esau came in from the field, starved. Esau said to Jacob, "Give me some of that red stew—I'm starved!" That's how he came to be called Edom (Red).

³¹ Jacob said, "Make me a trade: my stew for your rights as the firstborn."

³² Esau said, "I'm starving! What good is a birthright if I'm dead?"

³³⁻³⁴ Jacob said, "First, swear to me." And he did it. On oath Esau traded away his rights as the firstborn. Jacob gave him bread and the stew of lentils. He ate and drank, got up and left. That's how Esau shrugged off his rights as the firstborn.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: Psalm 119:105-112 Page 701

EPISTLE LESSON: Romans 8:1-11 CEB

Set free by the Spirit

8 So now there isn't any condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ God has done what was impossible for the Law, since it was weak because of selfishness. God condemned sin in the body by sending his own Son to deal with sin in the same body as humans, who are controlled by sin. ⁴ He did this so that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us. Now the way we live is based on the Spirit, not based on selfishness. ⁵ People whose lives are based on selfishness think about selfish things, but people whose lives are based on the Spirit think about things that are related to the Spirit. ⁶ The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. ⁷ So the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's Law, because it can't. ⁸ People who are self-centered aren't able to please God.

⁹ But you aren't self-centered. Instead you are in the Spirit, if in fact God's Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him. ¹⁰ If Christ is in you, the Spirit is your life because of God's righteousness, but the body is dead because of sin. ¹¹ If the Spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead

lives in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your human bodies also, through his Spirit that lives in you.

***GOSPEL LESSON: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 CEB**

Setting for the parables

13 That day Jesus went out of the house and sat down beside the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he climbed into a boat and sat down. The whole crowd was standing on the shore.

Parable of the soils

³ He said many things to them in parables: “A farmer went out to scatter seed. ⁴ As he was scattering seed, some fell on the path, and birds came and ate it. ⁵ Other seed fell on rocky ground where the soil was shallow. They sprouted immediately because the soil wasn’t deep. ⁶ But when the sun came up, it scorched the plants, and they dried up because they had no roots. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorny plants. The thorny plants grew and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and bore fruit, in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one. ⁹ Everyone who has ears should pay attention.”

Explanation of the parable of the farmer

¹⁸ “Consider then the parable of the farmer. ¹⁹ Whenever people hear the word about the kingdom and don’t

understand it, the evil one comes and carries off what was planted in their hearts. This is the seed that was sown on the path. ²⁰ As for the seed that was spread on rocky ground, this refers to people who hear the word and immediately receive it joyfully. ²¹ Because they have no roots, they last for only a little while. When they experience distress or abuse because of the word, they immediately fall away. ²² As for the seed that was spread among thorny plants, this refers to those who hear the word, but the worries of this life and the false appeal of wealth choke the word, and it bears no fruit. ²³ As for what was planted on good soil, this refers to those who hear and understand, and bear fruit and produce—in one case a yield of one hundred to one, in another case a yield of sixty to one, and in another case a yield of thirty to one.”

MESSAGE: “Seeds and Weeds”

As we know, Jesus liked to teach by way of parables. What is a parable? According to my Harper Collins Bible Dictionary, “parables are short sayings or stories with a double meaning. In their simplest form, the parables compare heavenly or spiritual things to mundane realities; for example, the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. In our world today, sometimes we can understand or translate what a particular parable means and sometimes we can’t. We need to remember that

each parable in our Bibles was written over 2000 years ago. Preachers, therefore, do well to account for how the literary and ancient cultural contexts of a parable shape **their** meaning potential while also being attentive to how the **parable addresses their own audiences in particular ways.**

So, I don't have to confess my sin, I will honestly tell you that some of this commentary came from Jennifer Vija Piotz, a professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary in Minneapolis. I think what she writes helps iron out some confusions we may have.

Back to Parables. As with all Jesus's parables, multiple layers of meaning can be discerned in the Parable of the Sower in **Matthew 13**. Indeed, part of the power of parables is their ability to continually surprise, challenge, and inspire **various audiences** by conveying a message through vivid analogies. Even so, Jesus's parables are not intended to be entirely open-ended, as evidenced by Jesus himself interpreting the Parable of the Sower for his disciples (Matthew 13:18–23). You may have heard this particular parable before. Matthew's version of the Parable of the Sower is also in the Gospels of Mark 4:1–20 and Luke 8:4–15. It's important to note that by this point in Matthew's Gospel, there is a growing distinction between the disciples, who have embraced Jesus and his

ministry, and those who challenge or reject Jesus. We talked about this last week. In fact, Jesus's Parables Discourse in Matthew 13 is framed by the Pharisees **conspiring to destroy him (for example, 12:14) and the people of his hometown rejecting him (13:54–58)**. Jesus just can't get away from those bad guys.

With that in mind, the Parable of the Sower is Jesus's commentary on the opposition to his ministry. Jesus is the sower (13:3) who sows the "seed" that is the **proclamation of the kingdom** (verse 19). Although Matthew commonly describes this kingdom as the **"kingdom of heaven," rather than the "kingdom of God" used in Mark and Luke, both phrases refer to the reign of God that Jesus proclaims and partially enacts by healing the sick, liberating the oppressed, and ministering to the rejected.**

Although Jesus's proclamation of the coming reign of God's mercy and justice is good news, it does not take **root with everyone who hears it. This is reflected in the parable by the various types of inhospitable ground upon which some of the "seeds" of Jesus's ministry fall. Indeed, it is striking that most of the parable describes the circumstances in which the seeds are lost rather than the one in which they flourish.**

First, the evil one steals the seeds that fall on the path (verses 4, 19). **Then** we learn that seeds that fall on rocky ground represent those who hear the word of the kingdom but **quickly fall away from it when faced with opposition** (verses 5–6, 20–21). Next, we hear of the “thorns” of worldly concerns strangling the word so that it has no yield (verses 7, 22). Jesus draws us into a bleak picture that reflects the reality of much of his ministry experience.

Against this backdrop, the conclusion of the parable comes as a welcome surprise. Although threats to the seeds of the kingdom abound, some of the seeds do land in good soil and produce abundant fruit (verses 8, 23). While we cannot be sure just how impressive a yield of a hundred, sixty, or thirtyfold was to Jesus’s ancient audience, the fact that anything at all grows in these mostly adverse conditions is amazing. The parable, therefore, ends with a hopeful promise: Despite significant obstacles, God will bring about God’s kingdom. And it will be good.

The parable implies that God’s reign takes root and spreads through those who hear the word, understand it, and thereby spread the seeds of the kingdom (verses 8, 23). Jesus’s disciples are the ones who have received his word and have grasped it, unlike

many in the crowds and perhaps even some of Jesus’s own family (12:46–50).

Professor Piotz, concludes with several aspects of this parable which could meaningfully address contemporary audiences:

- Faith in God is a gift from God. We cannot understand exactly how it occurs, but we are called to share the riches we have been given and strive to persevere in faith, guided by God’s word and the Holy Spirit.
- Christians are not to feel superior to those who have not embraced the gospel. We do not fully comprehend God’s work in the world. The kingdom is not yet here. The church is called to continually preach the gospel in word and deed, to all, leaving the results to God.
- Threats to the gospel flourishing in people’s lives persist. While the church cannot eliminate all threats, it can help people navigate them. For example, Christians can accompany people through tragedies that make them doubt that God is real. And we can help each other recognize the enduring temptation to place our trust in money and possessions instead of in God. The parable creates space for naming the particular challenges

we face to persevering in faith or to doing the work of the gospel.

- Amid bleak new cycles, unexpected hardships, and acknowledgment of our own weaknesses, we can trust that God is working to bring about God's purposes of life and abundance. Amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC: Video "Thy Word"

**PASTORAL PRAYER,
OUR LORD'S PRAYER:**

PRAYER RESPONSE: 769

Hear our prayer, O God. Hear our Prayer, O God.

Incline your ear to us, and grant us your peace.

INVITATION TO GENEROSITY:

When we share our material resources, we proclaim our trust in God's provision, abundance, and community. Let us give in order to support the ministry of this church in hope and faith.

OFFERTORY: "Look to the Savior" Bertha R. Frick

***DOXOLOGY:**

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise God, all creatures here below;

Praise God above you heavenly host;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen

***PRAYER OF DEDICATION AND THANKSGIVING:**

Generous God, receive these gifts and magnify them to bless our community and world. May these offerings reflect our gratitude for your beloved community and trust in your kingdom. Amen.

***CLOSING HYMN: 181 "You Are Salt for the Earth,
O People"**

BENEDICTION:

May you drink from the wells of God's abundance

Nourished by the grace of God

Sustained by the truth of God

Hydrated by the promise of God

As you go, spread the good news and good gifts the Holy One bestows upon all.

BENEDICTION RESPONSE: 571

O God of Love, O God of Peace

Make wars throughout the world to cease.

The wrath of human wrong restrain;

Give peace, O God, give peace again!

THE BELL IS RUNG

POSTLUDE: "Postlude in C" George Blake

PRAYER LIST: Bennie Pointer, Becky Ballard, Russ Hartmann, Marilyn Paul, Mary Lou and Urban Baum, Pam and Syd Safriet, Yvonne Weber, Jackie Canterbury, Sue Ganschinetz, our Beloved Country.