

Greetings members and friends of First Congregational Church of Shelburne,

This week's Worship Resource is attached and can also be found, along with this week's video, on our web page, shelburnechurch.org. This service offers another *God's Garden* parable, *The Mustard Seed*.

In the depths of summer, it is amazing how long it has been since we have worshipped together, sang together, prayed together, shared a meal together, laughed and cried together. Many of us see each other through the magic of Zoom for meetings and for our weekly Fellowship time on Sunday mornings. It is better than nothing, or a phone call, or shouting across a parking lot. It is far from being in each other's company. Our community life continues to change as a portion of our stay in place lives are just beginning to explore what lies beyond our doorsteps. As I look out on a turbulent nation, where Covid 19 is rampant, I am thankful that due to an engaged administration in our state and the cooperation of our residents, we continue to see a decline in cases and deaths even as we cautiously move outward. My father used to say that patience is a virtue, which in the Gormbley clan is oxymoronic since none of us have been blessed with that virtue. I would add that safety is a virtue as well. Not only for ourselves, but for all those in our families, our community and well beyond. Being a Christian and being a citizen means being responsible for ourselves and for others. I have every reason to believe this is our greatest strength as a people and as a nation.

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship

July 26, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This week's Worship Resource offers the Parable of the Mustard Seed. The image that is associated with this illustration is a tree full of birds. There is conversation concerning the birds; are they representative of all the peoples, suggesting the Kingdom of God is universal, where all are welcome? Are they representative of all the tribes of Israel? Or all the lost souls whom Jesus came to find and bring home? Regardless of what the birds are intended to represent, the message that everyone agrees with is that from small beginnings, the reign of God will grow. The Sunday video for this service may be found on the church web page, shelburnechurch.org,

Prayer Requests: We are accepting requests for prayer (healing, comfort, thanksgiving and others). Please send your requests to the Pastor at pastor01089@gmail.com. Requests will then be sent out through our email list to the congregation for our common prayer life during the week. PLEASE remember that all prayer requests received become public knowledge. If you are uncertain if your request for another might be confidential, do not send it.

And now let us be in worship

Morning Prayer (Psalm 104) & the Lord's Prayer

Bless the Lord, O my soul. You are clothed with honor and majesty. You set the earth on its foundations. You make springs come forth in the valleys, by the streams the birds of the air have their homes, they sing among the branches. Lord, may your glory endure forever. Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord! We offer this prayer in the name of Christ who taught us

to pray saying...*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. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Prayers of the People

Today's prayer is based on a prayer written by Harry Emerson Fosdick, pastor of the Riverside Church in NY City, 1930-1946. You may wish to add your own prayers for healing, prayers of thanksgiving, prayers for comfort and others during our time of meditation.

Let us come to God.

Gracious God, who sets forth creation in your own order, who fills it according to your design, and who places us in its midst, we come to you in prayer & meditation, seeking to speak what we need to say, and hoping to hear something of your voice. We desire, O God, liberation from all that imprisons us. We confess that we are not sure why you have created us in your own image and created us with the ability to love and the ability to hate. We would be free of this nature you have blessed and cursed us with.

We would rather be an example of how Christ can lift us up, of how we, above all else, are able to care for our neighbors, feed them, clothe them, comfort and cheer them. We would rather reflect your love, your tender mercies, your forgiveness and your healing, so that all who meet us, experience nothing, except your hospitality, your welcoming arms and the opportunity to grow into whoever you desire them to be. Free us, O God, and liberate us to be free and grow in your creation.

Free us, O God, from the shackles of our grief and our sorrow, for we are often brought low by the losses we endure; loss of loved ones, loss of youth, loss of livelihood, loss of ability, and in this time, loss of health, safety and security. At times, Lord of the living, it feels like all life is loss and we find ourselves unable to raise up our heads, our hearts, our souls, to the light of the life you have granted us. Through the comfort of your Holy Spirit, may we, who are so burdened, let our fetters fall.

Free us, O God, from all that distracts us from you, so that we may hear your voice more clearly, and in so doing, recognize your call. In our world there is so much noise and clutter, so many voices beckoning to us, leading us down paths far from your will and your way, chewing up our time, leaving us used up and empty. Grant us clarity of vision, to see what is of you and what is not. Grant us clarity of sound, to hear your voice above all others, and grant us clarity of purpose, to know what you would have us do with the blessings we have received.

Free us, O God, in this moment, to come before you, to lift up our thoughts, our concerns, our joys and our tears, let these our prayers be liberated from our hearts to rise up to you as incense.....

Gracious God, who sets forth creation in your own order, who fills it according to your design, and who places us, in the midst of it all, we offer our thanks, Amen

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:31-32, The Mustard Seed.

During his three years of public ministry, Jesus taught, preached, and healed. While his teaching is often considered from an ethical point of view, “how the faithful are to behave,” his preaching centered on the proclamation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. This is Jesus’ unrelenting message. In finding ways through which the people might come to understand the Kingdom of God, Jesus often used parables. Today’s text is one of these parables, The Mustard Seed.

He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

After the reading, you may reflect on this passage and share your thoughts.
There is a set of notes concerning this text for your reflection.

Benediction:

Like trees planted along the riverbank,
May we be rooted in you, O God.
Like trees planted along the riverbank,
May we bear the fruit of our ministry each season.
Like trees planted along the riverbank,
May we prosper in all we do
in the name of Jesus Christ, Amen

Notes on the text

One of my favorite images concerning the kingdom of God is the one we just heard. “*the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed. when it has grown, it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in it branches.*” it is an image of God’s garden. A tree where all the birds are welcome. Where they all can make their homes, live their lives in peace, and harmony. It doesn’t say anything about which particular birds. It just says birds. Every so often we are blessed to catch a glimpse of God’s garden. Samuel Colgate, the founder of the Colgate business empire in the early 1800’s was a devout Christian. An American Baptist Christian to be exact. He attended worship most every Sunday at his church. During one service, at the close of the sermon, an invitation was given for all those who wished to turn their lives over to Christ and be forgiven. One of the first persons to walk down the aisle and kneel at the altar was a well-known prostitute. She knelt. She wept. She asked God to forgive her and she wasn’t kidding. Meanwhile, the rest of the congregation looked on approvingly at what she was doing. They knew her sins as well as anyone. She should be confessing, they thought, and asking forgiveness. Then the woman stood and addressed the pastor and congregation. “I believe that God has forgiven me for my past life as a prostitute, I want to become a member of this church that brought me to Christ.” For a few moments, the silence was deafening. Finally, Samuel Colgate arose from his pew and said, “I guess we blundered when we prayed that the Lord would save sinners. We forgot to specify what kind of sinners. We’d better ask him to forgive us for this oversight. The Holy Spirit has touched this woman and made her truly repentant, but the Lord apparently doesn’t understand that she’s not the

type we want him to rescue. We'd better spell it out for him just which sinners we had in mind." And he sat down. Immediately a hand shot up in the congregation. "I wish to make a motion that we welcome this woman as a member of our congregation." Second? Asked the pastor. Seconded! A voice called out. Discussion? Asked the pastor. Silence. Said the congregation. Very well, the pastor continued. All those in favor of welcoming this woman into this congregation as a member, raise your hand. Every hand was raised. Opposed? Every hand went down. "I declare that the motion has passed unanimously with our thanks to brother Colgate." said the pastor. Every so often, we catch a glimpse of God's garden, the tree of life, the body of Christ, encouraging us to step over the barriers that divide us, the preconceived notions, the prejudices, the fear, the hatred and welcome the least among us, into the community of Christ. Every so often we catch a glimpse of the kingdom of God. Where have you caught a glimpse of God's Garden, the tree of life, the body of Christ?