

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 focuses on the Parable of the Sower from the Gospel of Matthew.

This Sunday you are all invited to our first all church conversation via Zoom. A more detailed email has gone out concerning this conversation and the ones that will follow. These are essential conversations around specific questions that your Pastoral Search Committee needs in order to complete the Church Profile. I encourage you to be a part of these conversations. The link for the meeting will arrive via email on Saturday. The conversation begins promptly at 10:30 AM.

I am looking forward to seeing you there!

Faithfully Yours,

Pastor Rob

Welcome to Sunday Worship August 9, 2020

Good Morning to our members and friends at home,

This week's Worship Resource continues our series of God's Garden. The Parable of the Sower often begins a debate from the soil's point of view concerning predestination and free will. This morning we will engage this story from the seed's point of view. In God's Garden, tossing seed is all about what the seed is and where the seed lands. The seeds of the living Word of God land everywhere. 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 & the Lord's Prayer

For all thing bright and beautiful,
For all things mysterious and lovely,
For all things green, growing, and strong,
For all things struggling to push life up through rocky earth,
For all human faces, hearts, minds, and hands which surround us,
For life and the life of this world,
For all that you have laid before us, O God, we lay our thankful hearts before you.
In Christ's name who taught us to prayer 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 offers images of God's great and universal garden. For those who spend time in gardens of one kind or another, our opening prayer is titled, *The Gardener's Prayer* by Karel Capek. 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.

O Lord, grant that in some way it may rain every day, say from about midnight until three o'clock in the morning, but, you see, it must be gentle and warm so that it can soak in; Grant that at the same time, it would not rain on the campion, alyssum, helianthus, lavender and others which you in your infinite wisdom know are drought-loving plants. I will write their names on a bit of paper if you like. And grant that the sun may shine the whole day long. But not everywhere (not, for instance, on the spirea, or on the plantain lily and rhododendron) and not too much; that there may be plenty of dew and little wind, enough worms, no plant lice and snails, slugs nor mildew, and that once a week guano may fall from heaven. Amen.

Loving God, exemplary creator, who brings forth not only the bounties of our tables but does so with colorful wonderful splendor. Even the thorn bush by the side of the road shines in your glory. If ever we have lost sight of you, we find you in the diverse miraculous pattern of life that you have sown into your creation. And we are grateful that you have made us in your image and set before us your ways of life. If ever we endeavor to be your people, teach us to see you in the vastness of your universal garden. Teach us to glimpse your nature in the faces of those we meet; those who are the angels of your garden, those who can charm the birds out of trees, those who can't seem to see the forest through the trees, and those who are down to earth and stand on common ground. If ever we find ourselves overwhelmed by the life you have blessed us with, teach us to see you in the vastness of your universal and communal garden. A place where all are welcome, all are valued, all are encouraged to grow and bloom. A place where are anxieties and cares might melt away in your garden. If ever we seek to be disciples of your Christ, teach us to work in your garden with joy. Let us welcome all into our common ministry, knowing that it does not matter to you how long we have gladly served in your gardens, only that we have willingly walked through the gate and joined the community with bucket and trowel in hand. Gracious God, whose very breath gives life, Hear now these our prayers.....

Loving God, exemplary creator, hear these our prayers and may your love, your grace and your mercy be with us in our times of joy and in our times of trial, in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 13:1-9, The Sower.

During Jesus' first two years of public ministry he traveled throughout the region of Galilee and made several trips through Judea to Jerusalem. His traveling ministry gave him opportunity to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God, to heal and to teach. Often opportunities to teach came in people's houses, on village streets, and out in the open. When teaching the people that gathered to hear him Jesus used parables; stories that used everyday images but came with a point. In today's text, Jesus is again with the crowds and offers the Parable of the Sower for their reflection.

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. 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. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

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:

God bless all who live and move in your garden of creation through which your glory shines.

May we see the wonder of your design, the promise of new creation, your call to be good stewards and the flourishing of the hope of transformation. God bless all creation with your love and generosity and may we see in its glory your awesome majesty Amen.

Notes on the text

In 1995, Brad Roberts wrote the title song to his band's new album, *God Shuffled His Feet*. The song is a narrative about God taking a day of rest after creation and dedicating that day to having a picnic. So, God and the people sit on their picnic blankets, in the garden, and enjoy the day. Since the people have God right there, they can't help but to ask a few questions like: "do you have to eat or get your hair cut in heaven?" God, the lyrics continue, *shuffled his feet and glanced around at them. The people cleared their throats and stared right back at him. So, God said: "Once there was a boy who woke up with blue hair to him it was a joy until he ran out into warm air. He thought of how his friends would come to see, and would they laugh, or had he got some strange disease?" God shuffled his feet and glanced around at them.* The people sat waiting on their blankets in the garden, but God said nothing. There is more to the song, but you get the point. In the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus tells the people about the word of God, he says, *once there was a sower.....* and we hear another

story of God's garden, the tossing of seed, seeds falling on the path, seeds falling on rocky soil, seeds in thorny soil, and seeds in good, rich, fertile soil. It's been my experience that whenever this parable is studied in a group, someone inevitably makes the observation, "well, if God is omniscient and all powerful, then God knows how everything is going to turn out, and therefore, it doesn't matter in the end. You are either hard packed ground, like the path, or a pile of rocks, or full of thorns or, you are good soil. It has been predestined. you are what you are. The rocks cannot become good ground, nor can the good ground become thorns. We are predestined to be saved or not." Someone else in the group says, "but what about free will?" "Doesn't God give us free will? Don't we have a choice in how we behave or how we hear the word of God?" "But, if God knows everything, then we are predestined, no, that can't be right, then I have no free will, and why would Jesus come along if there's nothing we can do about who we are?" The debate goes on and on, predestination or freedom of will. I have come to the conclusion that some things are not meant for us to fully comprehend. We will simply have to wait and see when we get there. The people want to know about the details of heaven in the song. They ask, but God shuffles his feet and tells them a parable. The boy with blue hair is happy. Until he considers what his friends might say. But he won't really know how his friends will react until he is with them. So, we won't really know about the details of heaven until we arrive there. If God does know everything, do we still have freedom of will? or not? We will just have to wait to find out. In the meantime, we might turn our attention towards issues and concerns that will make a difference in the here and now. When Jesus talks about God's garden and the tossing of seed he isn't offering a debate on predestination. He is offering an image of the Kingdom of God. More importantly, he is speaking about you and me and the Word of God. Let me offer a couple of growing tips concerning God's garden and the tossing of seed. In this parable the seed is the Word of God, at least that is what Jesus says. What is this Word of God that the sower tosses out so willingly? If Jesus is talking about the written Word of God, then he is talking about the Hebrew scriptures. Is that what the seeds are? Words on a page? The Gospel of John begins with the Word of God, the Word was with God, was God, and that Word became flesh, dwelt among us. Jesus is the living Word. In God's garden, the seed being tossed is the living Word, Jesus of Nazareth. In God's Garden, tossing seed is all about what the seed is and where the seed lands. The seeds of the living Word of God land everywhere. God is not miserly when the field is sown. When the seed is tossed your way, it's not an exercise in the theological debate concerning predestination and free will, it's not about the details of heaven, it's not about what will your friends say, it's about you, and what will you do with the living word of God in Jesus Christ?