

**Simple Prayer, Simple Praise:
A Worship Service for Sunday, July 26, 2020**

Opening Acclamation: (Psalm 105:1-4)

Give thanks to the LORD and call upon his Name;

*make known his deeds among the peoples.

Sing to him, sing praises to him, * and speak of all his marvelous works.

Glory in his holy Name; * let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

Search for the LORD and his strength; * continually seek his face.

A Reading from the Gospel According to Matthew 13:31-33; 44-52

Jesus put before the crowds 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." He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened."

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which someone found and hid; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down, and put the good into baskets but threw out the bad. So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous and throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. "Have you understood all this?" They answered, "Yes." And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like the master of a household who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."



Meditation (by *The Rev. Twila Smith, St. Simon's and The Genesis Center, Buffalo*)

In these past few months, our awareness has been heightened about small things. There's a virus we cannot see, which can cause great harm, and we wonder where and how long it may linger, how to keep it from spreading, what will clean it away. We also know there are sins of the past and present which we do not always see and they can cause great harm, too; such sins linger, spread among us, and we cannot, on our own, scrub them out.

Yet God's reign, God's glorious kingdom, also emerges from small things. When we search, in faith, the possibilities for our common good can shine like treasures, ready for us to open and share. A more just and equitable future grows up from seeds we till in the rich soil of God's grace. Nets cast with expectation can bring in more than we can imagine. As we look to remove what is harmful, Christ has already placed a hopeful future into our hands – like leavened dough to work and knead with our Creator, to rise and be broken open and give for others.

These days we can feel overcome with discouragement and fear of what is around us and dread of what might come, stuck in a place nowhere near the shore of goodness and plenty. These are the times to watch for small things, to notice holy work underway. Jesus comes in to remind us how little it takes, in God's care, for new life and growth to come forth. As many of our usual connections with each other have changed, small acts of kindness, forgiveness, and generosity are taking hold, bringing us together in new ways and giving tangible evidence of God's work among us.

What small thing can we give into God's care this week, expecting glorious growth? Where might we invite God to work with us, trusting in grace and love?

Prayer:

*Almighty God, you have provided us with every good thing; grant us the grace to imagine a world in which every one of your children have plenty to eat, a safe place to live, and opportunities for work which sustains their families. Send your Holy Spirit upon our communities so that those beautiful gifts which we imagine can become realities through sharing our treasures with the needy among us; this we ask in Jesus' name, **Amen.***

Take a moment now for silent reflection. Think of the people and things that cause you worry or concern; think of the things for which you are grateful. Raise them up in prayer using the words our Savior Christ taught us:

**Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed by 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
for ever and ever. Amen.**



Grace:

*We lift up to you, Our Heavenly Father, each too-small attempt to change our world. Aided by your grace, bring our heartfelt efforts to accomplish more than we can ask or imagine. We lift up to you, Savior Christ, each instance of our own suffering, small compared to your own. Wrapped in your loving embrace, let our wounds be healed and our bodies be made strong to witness to your healing power and mercy. We lift up to you, Holy Spirit, our hopes and dreams; which in God's time may seem small or fleeting; empower us with the fiery passion for ministry that we may use our spiritual gifts in service to others; we ask this in Jesus' name, **Amen.***

Take a moments and think about how you are empowered to witness God's power in your own ministry and vocation. Pray for all who are dependent upon the ministries your region's congregations support: food pantries, clothing ministries, feeding programs, and social justice work.

Each Sunday at 10 a.m., Bishop Sean and other leaders from WNY and NWPA will lead worship via the Zoom platform. Anyone can join the service via phone by calling **646-876-9923 use code 127336938#**. Those wishing to join by instead of video can use this link: <https://zoom.us/j/127336938> If you are asked for a password, use **lakeerie**.

Simple Prayer, Simple Praise is produced for The Episcopal Dioceses of NWPA and WNY by the Rev. Steve Lane and the Rev. Claudia Scheda, and guest contributors as noted. July 2020.