**The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, July 12, 2020, the Rev. David Ota**

**Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65:1-14; Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9; 18-23**

Good morning Saints! We live in challenging if not dark times. As the pandemic spreads and more and more people are getting infected, it has exposed the social inequity of our American way of life. We may wonder where is God in all of this?

In our lesson from Isaiah for today, the prophet recounting how the exiles from Babylon were returning to the homeland compared God’s Word being sent out to water falling as rain or snow, then watering the land so seed could be sown and bread could be made before it returns to the skies. In short God’s Word will shower the earth with purpose before it returns.

So sometimes, especially in challenging and dark times, it might seem as if God is absent, but God continues to send out the good word, you are loved. This point is highlighted even more in today’s gospel lesson, when Jesus tells the parable of the sower.

The sower planting seeds by scattering them in a motion where the seeds falls on different types of soil: the path, the rocky ground, the ground with weeds and the fertile soil. Often, I have interpreted the different kinds of soil to be the condition of our individual lives at a given time.

When life has made us bitter from disappointment, we may close our hearts to the possibility of God’s love. We all know times in our life when this has happened to us. A friend may have betrayed a confidence. Our romantic interest in a beloved may have been rejected. Our efforts to help may not have been recognized. So, in the end, when we have been betrayed, rejected or not recognized, we may give up and close our hearts.

We may also live on the surface instead of contemplating the deeper issues. We may be unaware of how our upbringing has affected our point of view. Instead of asking deeper questions about why we believe the things we do, we simply accept what we have been raised to believe. We might assume things about other people because of their appearance without knowing their story. And because we don’t know our own story well, we may not recognize that our neighbors have an untold story. So, when things become difficult, we lack the capacity for empathy to love others in the totality of their reality.

We may live as if life is a competition for scarce resources and the concerns for having enough takes over our lives. When we conceive the world as a dog eat dog world, then forgiveness and grace are lost for the sake of winning. For example, for students it means studying for grades instead of studying to learn. We become concerned about what we will earn instead of what we can give. We lose the capacity for recognizing that we are all God’s children and we are called to care for each other.

Or we may live as if life is a gift. It doesn’t mean we haven’t had our disappointments in life, but it does mean that we have come to understand these disappointments differently. We are willing to accept the pain of betrayal, rejection and lack of recognition for the sake of caring for others, loving others. We are less concerned that we are loved by some particular person, because the challenges of life has not broken us down and hardened us, but broken us open, as David Brooks is fond of saying. We are less concerned about how we stack up as compared to others, and are more concerned about the quality of our relationships and whether we have love in our hearts or not.

None of these ways of living is permanent. We don’t have to be stuck in disappointment and bitterness. We don’t have to be unaware of our own story and the stories of others. We don’t have to view our neighbors as competitors for scarce resources. We won’t always be in a place ready and able to receive love.

But the good news is that no matter what condition our life is in at a given time, God continues to share the good news of God’s love for us and all. God continues to love us, even when we cannot feel it, or am not aware of it, or have it choked out of us. God does not give up.

But when God’s love does take root in us, we can be used to love others as we have been loved. In the midst of challenging and dark times, the ability to love others is a gift.

There will be times when we don’t feel loved or loving. And it is at those times when we must remember that God loves us not because we are loveable but because God is love. Remember that you are loved. Remember that your neighbor is also loved by God. Remember that we are all called to let God’s love take root in us, so we may be able to recognize one another as God’s beloved ones.

This is not easy to do. When you find it difficult to love someone pray for God’s Spirit within you to transform your vision so God’s love can flow through you. Then your vision will be transformed to compassion with empathy, and you may be able to see the person not from your own point of view, but from God’s point of view. The goal is to love as we have been loved.

Sometimes the loving thing to do is to speak the truth with compassion to help your neighbor see himself or herself more clearly. Sometimes the loving thing to do is to listen without speaking, so your neighbor can express the pain he or she may be feeling. Sometimes the loving thing to do is to change your own mind after listening, because of what has been shared with you.

This is what needs to happen today in our country. We are all called to change our mind about our history, and to clearly see how our history needs to be more fully understood, so we can move forward together. This will take time. It will not be easy.

Descendants of slaves and descendants of slave owners both need to tell their stories and have them heard. Their pain needs to be listened to, especially the descendants of slaves.

Descendants of immigrants and descendants of Native peoples need to tell their sacred stories and to listen to the stories of all the others as well.

We all need to tell our stories to become more fully aware of the joys and painful aspects of our stories. And we need to listen to our neighbors’ stories so we all may be changed by our fuller understanding. And then hopefully we can become reconciled and find a way to move forward together. So, in the end we will all be changed by listening ian the Spirit.

Even though these times are difficult and dark, God’s Word of reconciling love continues to be scattered to all of us. May it take root in our hearts, and in the heart of our nation. Amen.

**I propose to show that no matter what the circumstances of our lives may be, God continues to be merciful and gracious, abundantly sowing the Word of life to all who may receive it, so that we may live with hope and pass on the good Word both in challenging times and peaceful times.**

**The Collect**

O Lord, mercifully receive the prayers of your people who call upon you, and grant that they may know and understand what things they ought to do, and also may have grace and power faithfully to accomplish them; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Isaiah 55:10-13**

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,

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.

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.

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.

**The Response**

**Psalm 65: (1-8), 9-14**

***Te decet hymnus***

[1 You are to be praised, O God, in Zion; \*
to you shall vows be performed in Jerusalem.

2 To you that hear prayer shall all flesh come, \*
because of their transgressions.

3 Our sins are stronger than we are, \*
but you will blot them out.

4 Happy are they whom you choose
and draw to your courts to dwell there! \*
they will be satisfied by the beauty of your house,
by the holiness of your temple.

5 Awesome things will you show us in your righteousness,
O God of our salvation, \*
O Hope of all the ends of the earth
and of the seas that are far away.

6 You make fast the mountains by your power; \*
they are girded about with might.

7 You still the roaring of the seas, \*
the roaring of their waves,
and the clamor of the peoples.

8 Those who dwell at the ends of the earth will tremble at your marvelous signs; \*
you make the dawn and the dusk to sing for joy.]

9 You visit the earth and water it abundantly;
you make it very plenteous; \*
the river of God is full of water.

10 You prepare the grain, \*
for so you provide for the earth.

11 You drench the furrows and smooth out the ridges; \*
with heavy rain you soften the ground and bless its increase.

12 You crown the year with your goodness, \*
and your paths overflow with plenty.

13 May the fields of the wilderness be rich for grazing, \*
and the hills be clothed with joy.

14 May the meadows cover themselves with flocks,
and the valleys cloak themselves with grain; \*
let them shout for joy and sing.

**The Epistle**

**Romans 8:1-11**

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 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, 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. 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. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 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, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

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. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. 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.

**The Gospel**

**Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

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!”

“Hear then the parable of the sower. 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. As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 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. 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. 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.”

**In preparation for this coming Sunday’s worship, please pray this coming Sunday’s Collect of the Day and read and reflect on the lessons assigned as printed below**

**The Collect**

Almighty God, the fountain of all wisdom, you know our necessities before we ask and our ignorance in asking: Have compassion on our weakness, and mercifully give us those things which for our unworthiness we dare not, and for our blindness we cannot ask; through the worthiness of your Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

**Old Testament**

**Isaiah 44:6-8**

Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:

I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.

Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before me.

Who has announced from of old the things to come?
Let them tell us what is yet to be.

Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared it?
You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?
There is no other rock; I know not one.

**The Response**

**Psalm 86:11-17**

***Inclina, Domine***

11 Teach me your way, O Lord,
and I will walk in your truth; \*
knit my heart to you that I may fear your Name.

12 I will thank you, O Lord my God, with all my heart, \*
and glorify your Name for evermore.

13 For great is your love toward me; \*
you have delivered me from the nethermost Pit.

14 The arrogant rise up against me, O God,
and a band of violent men seeks my life; \*
they have not set you before their eyes.

15 But you, O Lord, are gracious and full of compassion, \*
slow to anger, and full of kindness and truth.

16 Turn to me and have mercy upon me; \*
give your strength to your servant;
and save the child of your handmaid.

17 Show me a sign of your favor,
so that those who hate me may see it and be ashamed; \*
because you, O Lord, have helped me and comforted me.

**The Epistle**

**Romans 8:12-25**

Brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh-- for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, “Abba! Father!” it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ-- if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

**The Gospel**

**Matthew 13:24-30,36-43**

Jesus put before the crowd another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?’ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest; and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’”

Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!”