



Sunday Devotion

July 12, 2020

Find a quiet place by yourself or with another and come to God.

SLIDE 1 HYMN SING

#408 There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit

1. There's a sweet, sweet Spirit in this place,
and I know it's the Spirit of the Lord;
there are sweet expressions on each face,
and I know they feel the presence of the Lord.

refrain: Sweet Holy Spirit, sweet heavenly Dove,
stay right here with us, filling us with your love;
and for these blessings we lift our hearts in praise; without a doubt we know
that we have been revived when we shall leave this place.

2. There are blessings you cannot receive
till you know him in his fullness and believe;
you've the one to profit when you say,
"I am going to walk with Jesus all the way."

Refrain

SLIDE 2 #753 Make me a Channel of Your Peace *****(LEANNE - NOTE THE VERSES AND THEIR ORDER)

1. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me bring your love
Where there is injury, your pardon,
Lord, and where there's doubt, true faith in you

3. O, Master grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled, as to console,
To be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love, with all my soul.

2. Make me a channel of your peace.
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light,
And where there's sadness, ever joy.

SLIDE 3 CALL TO WORSHIP

Come to this time of worship.

It is good to be here this morning.

This is a time to offer praise to God.

With joy I thank God for all the blessings that have been poured on me.

Come, worship God who showers mercy upon his people.

Praise God who offers rest and peace.

OPENING PRAYER

O God, I come into your presence with expectation, hungry for an encounter with you, eager to hear your Word.

Open my eyes and ears to the presence of your Holy Spirit. May the seeds of your Word scattered all around fall on fertile soil. May they take root in my heart and life and produce an abundant harvest of good words and deeds.

I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, my teacher and my Lord. Amen.

SLIDE 4 HYMN #32 I Sing the Mighty Power of God

1. I sing the mighty power of God
that made the mountains rise,
that spread the flowing seas abroad
and built the lofty skies.
I sing the wisdom that ordained
the sun to rule the day.
The moon shines full at God's
command,
and all the stars obey.

2. I sing the goodness of the Lord
who filled the earth with food.
God formed the creatures through
the Word,
and then pronounced them good.
Lord, how thy wonders
are displayed,
wher-e'er I turn my eye,
If I survey the ground I tread,
or gaze upon the sky!

3. There's not a plant or flower below
but makes thy glories known.
And clouds arise, and tempests blow
by order from thy throne,
While all that borrows life from thee
is ever in thy care,
and everywhere that we can be,
thou, God, art present there.

STOP SCREEEN SHARE

CALL TO CONFESSION

We are ever in God's care but we find excuses not to be attentive to God focusing instead on our own desires. So turn your heart around toward the ever present God to confess your failures and shortcomings knowing that God is ever eager to forgive you and offer you new and abundant life.

SLIDE 5 PRAYER OF BROKENESS

We know the seeds we have sown, Harvesting God: anger which springs from our flinty hearts; bitterness which flows like a rushing river into another's heart; hurtful words which wrap their thorny briars around a friend's kindness; selfishness which poisons a relationship. Forgive us, Loving God, and have mercy.

Your grace can turn our fallow hearts into rich fields of love. Your hope can smooth the rocks in our way so

we can go to be reconciled to another. Your love for us in Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, can untangle the thorny mess we have made of our lives. Bless us with these gifts, we pray. Amen.

STOP SCREEN SHARE

WORDS OF BLESSING AND ASSURANCE

God hears your cries and heals your wounded heart. God is preparing you for good things to come. Place your trust in God who has always loved you and will always love you. Remember that Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen.

SLIDE 6 OLD TESTAMENT LESSON Genesis 25:19-34

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.

STOP SCREEN SHARE

TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

SLIDE 7 *NEW TESTAMENT LESSON* Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. ² Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach. ³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: “Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ 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. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. ⁹ Let anyone with ears listen!”

¹⁸“Hear then the parable of the sower. ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹ 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. ²² 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. ²³ 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.”

STOP SCREEN SHARE

SERMON

“How does a bastard, orphan, son of a whore and a Scotsman, dropped in the middle of a forgotten spot in the Caribbean by providence, impoverished, in squalor, grow up to be a scholar?” This is the opening line of the Broadway smash hit, *Hamilton*, written by Lin-Manuel Miranda. Thanks to my children, I have Disney+ on my TV and was able to watch this spectacular portrayal of the life of Alexander Hamilton, immigrant turned American patriot, significant contributor to the American Revolution and chief architect of the American financial system. He was an important and unwavering force in the political revolution that produced the U.S. Constitution and the American form of government, ensuring that the ideals he had fought for would endure. However, just as the opening line suggests, Hamilton came from a less-than favorable upbringing. It was only by a series of extraordinary events that allowed him to rise to such a lofty stature.

There have certainly been scores of people who overcame the challenges of poverty and lack of resources to become highly influential. Benjamin Franklin was one of 17 children who had to drop out of school at the age of ten to become an indentured servant to a printmaker. Working there he was able to continue to read and write as he learned from the material that was printed and then to go on to become an inventor, writer, promoter of public health and, of course, contributor in the founding of this country.

Axl Rose was born in Lafayette, Indiana to a poor and very religious family. Although very shy at school, Rose became the local juvenile delinquent. He was arrested more than 20 times on charges such as public intoxication and battery, and served jail terms up to three months. After Indiana authorities threatened to charge him as a habitual criminal, Rose moved to Los Angeles following his school friend Izzy Stradlin. They lived together in very cheap and dirty rooms around LA before signing with Geffen Records in 1986 and formed the highly successful rock band, Guns N' Roses that sold over 100 million records and was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame.

Born in rural Mississippi to a teenage mother, Oprah Winfrey moved to inner city Milwaukee. There she was abused and became pregnant at the age of 14. The child was born prematurely and died in infancy. She was then sent to live with her father, a barber, living in Tennessee. During her high school years she started working in radio. At the age of 19 she co-anchored the evening news. And the rest, as they say, is history.

As society saw it, none of these could claim anything special about themselves. In fact, they had a lot of strikes against them. And yet, they were each able to overcome their challenges and become someone amazing. Who would have thought it?

Maybe you know someone in your own circle of acquaintances that defied the odds. It was to these very people that chapter 13 in Matthew's gospel addresses in Jesus' parables. Matthew's gospel is all about those who faced an abundance of challenges and the divisions within the culture due to individual circumstances usually beyond anyone's control. Remember, it is in this gospel that begins with Jesus' very humble birth to a poor unmarried peasant girl betrothed to a poor carpenter. Both had the background of being among those who the mighty Roman Empire had conquered. For centuries before Rome they had known political oppression and a reduced global social status. Yet to these two unlikely parents, foreign wise men visited with expensive gifts because they, not the Jewish religious crowd, recognized the King of the Jews. The son of peasants then grew to be an itinerant rabbi who got a bunch of fishermen, tax collectors, political insurrectionists and other cast outs to be his disciples, his pupils. In his most famous of sermons he proclaimed that the poor would receive the kingdom of heaven. The meek would inherit the earth. Who would have thought?

Prior to chapter 13, Jesus is rejected by the Jewish Authorities. He has several oppositional encounters with them leaving the leaders to believe that Jesus was in league with the devil as we read in chapter 12:24. Jesus' teachings went against their understanding of the laws and God's ways. Those who lived any other kind of life did

not receive God's favor and blessing, as they understood it. Now in chapter 13 Jesus addresses that false assumption and does so by beginning with this parable.

The chapter begins with what some have called the Parable of the Soil, but in fact it is the Parable of the Sower, even Jesus calls it that because the focus is on the Sower who seems to randomly, even foolishly, throw seed willy-nilly, landing where it may.

Four soil types are identified but only one has a shot at yielding anything resembling a good and lasting crop. But then, this would be no news at all to actual farmers. You wonder what the people heard when Jesus first told this story. Maybe some of the actual farmers in the crowd laughed to themselves to hear the story. "This guy's been in the woodshop too long," some may have mused, "because he doesn't have a clue as to what farming is all about."

Today we might have the same reaction if we heard a story about a farmer who hooked up his planter to the back of his John Deere, started up the tractor, but then threw the switch to activate the planter even before he was out of his driveway. There he is putt-putting down the country lane with corn seed scattering everywhere as he goes. It bounces on the road, some flies into the ditch. When he finally gets near his field, he first has to cut through a weedy and thorny patch with corn seed still flying out loosey-goosey from that planter that, by all rights, had been switched on way too early.

In truth, no farmer would be so careless, so wild in the scattering of valuable seed. It would not even make sense to do this. It would be a waste, a spectacle of great absurdity that a frugal and economically minded farmer would never tolerate. Of course, some experts on the Ancient Near East point out that fields back then were not as pristine as fields you might see in the Bucks County countryside today. Ditches, rocky patches, even roads and paths all co-mingled in many “fields” such that inevitably some seed would fall into a variety of soil conditions. Even though farmers would try to make rows with the seeds thrown out by hand, the farmer in this parable seems pretty extravagant and none-too-careful in flinging the seeds around.

This farmer has got (apparently) more than enough seed to go around and so throws it anywhere and everywhere, the odds of success notwithstanding. Having walked his fields so many times, he would have been well aware of the potential. He would have known the soil’s conditions. He would have known there were thorns, rocks, hard paths as well as the good soil. Still he throws perhaps because he knows over time, soil changes. Old plants, even weeds die both giving and making way for new life. Birds fly to more desirable climates. Paths once worn by over use get by-passed when a short cut is found. Soil has its seasons.

The soil then in this parable describes not so much the different types of people so much as it describes with unsettling accuracy, the several stages in the life of any

person—you, me, Mother Theresa, Benjamin Franklin, Axl Rose, Oprah Winfrey or even Saddam Hussein. The soil of which we human beings are made has seasons, and the seasons of our soil have everything to do with the way we handle the issues of life and eternity.

A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon about growing in good soil. He placed four worms into four separate jars. The first worm was put into a container of Kentucky bourbon. The second worm was put into a container that had captured cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil. At the conclusion of the sermon, he reported the following results: the first worm in the bourbon: dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke: dead. The third worm in chocolate syrup: dead. The fourth worm in good clean soil: alive. So the minister asked the congregation, “What can we learn from this demonstration?” A little old woman in the back quickly raised her hand and answered, “As long as you drink, smoke, and eat chocolate, you won’t have worms!”

Think about the hardened soil. What hardens the path are things like heartbreak, disappointment and disillusionment. There are times in our lives when we have been so hurt by the pain of life, when love has been lost making us not want to love again; when giving something all our time and effort then fails; when we’ve been betrayed,

often we get angry with God. Why weren't we protected from such things? If this is how God takes care of us, then forget it and we turn our backs on God. Or when the church has let us down, not provided sanctuary or safety or welcome, we leave and our hearts are hardened. We aren't going to let God in. And then the birds come, you know, those ideologies, prescriptions, and mind numbing substances that promise the cure to all that ails you or at least let you forget. Think of all the self-help books and clubs that are so enticing and promising. I remember hearing about a weight loss program that was all about water. Oh, there were some pills you were to take but the main ingredient was to take long baths with the water up to your neck and breath deep. I'm not really sure how that was supposed to work, but I'm sure that someone made their fortune off of it. Birds. Where there is an exposed vulnerable seed, there are lots of birds out there just waiting to gobble it up. That's how street gangs work. Children living in desperate situations who have little hope or support and are enticed by a gang that offers security and acceptance.

Then there's the rocky soil, shallow soil. These are folks who are not that bad off but they have nevertheless been made fiercely shallow by a get-rich-quick, instant gratification culture of indulgence and fads. They've been trained by commercials to always be on the lookout for products touted as "New and Improved" and have come to believe that the next best thing to come along is always just around the corner and it

will be theirs for the snagging. Sometimes the seed of the gospel shoots up like a fast-growing kudzu in people's hearts but then withers just as quickly when the shallow, me-first craving for novelty once more takes over.

How about the soil with thorns or weeds. This is one that I can relate to well. This kind of soil is the folks that are just plain busy and crowded. These hearts are neither calloused nor shallow. In fact, there is some real depth to them. Lots of stuff grows here. But in the end, it's too much. The seed of the gospel comes in and sprouts just fine but faces stiff competition for light and warmth and nutrients because the weeds are taking it all. The weeds Jesus describes aren't Dandelions; they're prickly. They can hurt. I think one of the biggest thorny weed we are facing right now is the hatred, distrust and insensitivity that is choking the life out of our culture. In so many places it seems to be choking out the good that is still with us.

Sometimes the weeds start growing when you open your eyes in the morning and ends when you close them at night only to start again at 2:00 AM when you can't sleep – weeds. While some distractions are necessary and even good, I'm talking about the ones that pile up on top of each other, over and over again. There is a weariness that creeps in and can choke the life out of us. With all these weeds, there is little room for the good news of the love of God.

To all these “soils” as well as the “good soil,” the sower casts his seed. The story would have been shocking to many who heard it. There were many--in those days, and in ours--who most certainly did not think God had sown the seed of the word everywhere in the world. God had absolutely done no such thing. God would never waste good seed, good news, on those who wouldn't even know what to do with it. God had sown the word only where it should go, in “good” soil where it would be accepted and growth could be guaranteed like in Israel--or in America, or in the Roman Catholic Church, or only among those who believe protestant theology. Notice that Israel is not special in Jesus' story, and that would have caused some major grinding of teeth in some people. The same is true today.

Often we hear stories about resources being wasted on those who would either not appreciate them or worse, mistreat them. Why should we improve living conditions in the poorer areas of our cities? They will only get vandalized. There was a movie called “Freedom Writers” which is based on the experience of Erin Gruwell, a dedicated teacher in a racially divided Los Angeles school. Her class was made up of at-risk teenagers deemed incapable of learning. Instead of giving up, she inspires her students to take an interest in their education and planning their future. She assigns reading material that relates to their lives and encourages them all to keep journals. The students not only learned, they thrived and the season of their soil changed.

For all soils, I believe there is also the possibility of becoming that 4th soil – the soil that is ready to receive the seed and let it grow to maturity, to harvest. Soil types last but a season. The soil that is so resistant that birds carry away the seed before it takes root, or so shallow that a sprout springs up and dies within a day, or so encumbered with itself that its weeds shock out the seed of God’s love is also the soil that can bring forth abundantly. I wouldn’t dare give up hope for any soil because I don’t think God does. What if no seed was ever cast in the likes of Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Franklin, Oprah Winfrey?

The ancient wisdom writer of Proverbs said “Three things are too wonderful for me; four I do not understand.” J. Ellsworth Kalas said “there is a 5th, the most wondrous of all: the seasons of the soil of the human soul.”

God never gives up but just keeps throwing out seed trusting that one day it will be in good soil.

PASTORAL PRAYER

God who plants seeds of hope and justice within all lives, I am so grateful for my community of faith and for all, anywhere, who hunger and thirst for your healing, reconciling word. You know all the things that are in my heart today and you bring me together in spirit with others followers of Jesus by your love and support. I ask your healing mercies with those who struggle with illness of every kind, with feeling lost and marginalized; for those who mourn and for whom the darkness of sorrow enshrouds them. I ask your growth-producing love for all those

who celebrate and rejoice today. Be with all those whom I hold in my heart. Help me to reach out to others in compassion and support, for I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

SLIDE 8 *HYMN* #649 Amazing Grace

1. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
was blind, but now I see.

2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved.
How precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!

3. Through many dangers, toils, and snares
I have already come.
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

4. The Lord has promised good to me;
His word my hope secures.
He will my shield and portion be
As long as life endures.

5. When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.

STOP SCREEN SHARE

BENEDICTION

Go forth as God's people.

Sow seeds of love and joy in the world.

Go forth as Christ's true friends.

Sow seeds of justice and hope in oppression-strewn paths.

Go forth as the Spirit's love.

Sow seeds of peace and reconciliation in every corner of creation.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. Amen.

SLIDE 9 YouTube "I'm Not Giving Up on You" (switch to next slide when the clapping starts)

SLIDE 10 (after the video)