

Sunday Worship

November 15, 2020

*Draw near to God
for God is waiting for you.*

CALL TO WORSHIP

What mysteries there are in God's world!

We, so sophisticated, stand in awe at the wonders of the natural world.

We look at the tiniest of seeds and wonder what will happen

From that small seed will grow a large shrub.

Although we consider our gifts to be small and insignificant,

God will use our gifts in miraculous ways.

Let us worship and praise the God of small seeds and mighty power. Amen.

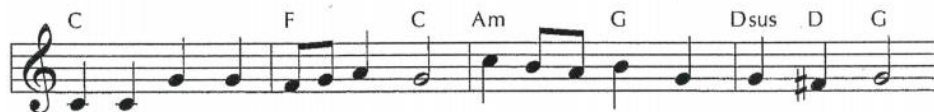
OPENING PRAYER

Most wonderful God, we approach you with our small lives, our tiny minds and our large ignorance, but also with our purest longings and hopes. We want to worship you with all that we have and are, but unless you encourage and assist us, we will fail in this our holiest intention. Therefore please let your Spirit move in our hearts and minds, lifting us above things of secondary importance, and concentrating our whole being on your love and graciousness. Through Christ Jesus who is the source of our confidence and the joy of our hearts desiring. Amen.

HYMN #19 God of Great and God of Small



1 God of great and God of small, God of one and God of all,
 2 God of land and sky and sea, God of life and des - ti - ny,
 3 God of si - lence, God of sound, God by whom the lost are found,
 4 God of heaven and God of earth, God of death and God of birth,



God of weak and God of strong, God to whom all things be - long,
 God of nev - er - end - ing power, yet be - side me ev - ery hour,
 God of day and dark - est night, God whose love turns wrong to right,
 God of now and days be - fore, God who reigns for - ev - er - more,

Refrain



al - le - lu - ia, al - le - lu - ia, praise be to your name.

CALL TO CONFESSION

It is not our past which keeps us from God, for that is behind us. It is not our present, for God is with us on this day. And our future is held tight in God's hands. It is true - there is absolutely nothing which can separate us from God. Whatever sins we have committed, God's forgiveness and love take them away forever. So come now and confess your brokenness before God who is ready to give a future of hope.

PRAYER OF BROKENNESS AND CONFESSION

Lord, we like BIG things. We have focused on big cars, big houses, big bank accounts, big, big, big! And you must be disappointed in us when we forget that from even the smallest thing something mighty can happen. Today the scriptures remind us of the smallness of the mustard seed and the tiny grain of yeast. Each of these things grew into something that offered shelter, peace, and hope, which became the treasures of compassion. Take away our need for the BIG possessions. Open our hearts to receive your word of love and healing, and let our spirits be ready to grow for you. Forgive our stubborn resistance to your faithful presence. For all things will work for the good for those who love God and are called according to God's purpose. Amen.

WORDS OF BLESSING AND ASSURANCE

Don't be frantic! God is working mighty things in your life. You have been given the spirit of hope and courage. God is with you. Place your trust in God's absolute care. Remember this good news: Jesus died for you. Jesus forgives you. Jesus loves you. Jesus is good to you. Amen!

GLORIA PATRI

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen. Amen.

FIRST SCRIPTURE LESSON 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. ⁹As it is written,

“He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor;
his righteousness endures forever.”

¹⁰He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. ¹¹You will be enriched in every way to be generous in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God. ¹²For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. ¹³By their approval of this service, they will glorify God because of your submission that comes from your confession of the gospel of Christ, and the generosity of your contribution for them and for all others, ¹⁴while they long for you and pray for you, because of the surpassing grace of God upon you. ¹⁵Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!

TIME WITH THE CHILDREN

HYMN #700 I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me

1. I'm gonna live so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime! (2Xs)
2. I'm gonna work so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime! (2Xs)
3. I'm gonna pray so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime! (2Xs)
4. I'm gonna sing so God can use me anywhere, Lord, anytime! (2Xs)

SECOND SCRIPTURE LESSON Matthew 13:31-33

³¹ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² 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.” ³³ 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.”

SERMON – We are the Mustard Seeds

A man by the name of James Spangler was hired as a janitor. Problem was he suffered from asthma. In 1806 the only means of cleaning large rugs was to sweep it with a broom. This caused serious health problems for Spangler. As a tinkerer, he got the idea in his head that he could take an old fan motor, which he attached it to a soap box stapled to a broom handle. He then converted an old pillowcase into a dust collector and attached that as well. Some said it looked like bag pipes attached to a cake box.

Initially, there wasn't much interest in such a device. Spangler gave a similar “electric suction cleaner” to his cousin, Susan Hoover, who was married to businessman William Hoover. It was Hoover who was able to make this product popular by hiring salesmen to go door to door and demonstrate the product. The company grew from producing just six vacuums a day to \$107 million dollar industry when it was sold to Techtronic Industries in 2006.

Inspirational author and speaker, Israelmore Ayivor, said, “Every big castle was once started with a single block; despise no small beginnings. A little step taken every day builds up the hope of greater accomplishments. Do something every day!” He is reminding us to recognize the potential that lies in things that may seem small or insignificant. Massive trees start as tiny seeds. Wondrous buildings and structures begin from a simple idea. The beautiful complexities of our bodies grow from a single cell.

Don't despise or look down on small beginnings. Even if your vision is for a forest, recognize the importance and potential of stewarding what's in your hand, whether it's an empty piece of land, a sapling, a single seed, or just an idea. What we have now has significance, if we choose to see it.

Today's gospel lesson is about little things growing into something big and important. I wonder how many of you have sown some mustard seeds lately. I never have. As the story tells us, they are small, tiny even – less than 1/8th of an inch. They don't look as impressive as other seeds like a pumpkin seed or even a tomato seed. They would not seem like they have much potential, but Jesus says, think about how they grow. They become one of the greatest shrubs you'll ever see, offering shelter and shade for the birds, a home for their nests, and a gift for the whole world. The kingdom of heaven is like that, says Jesus.

Jody Welker, pastor of the Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian Church pondered the parable of the mustard seed in light of the stewardship season. He suggested that if Jesus were to tell the parable today, it would sound something like this:

“The kingdom of heaven is like a church member who pledges and tithes for the work of God at his or her church. Compared to the giving of wealthy donors to football and basketball teams or compared to the contributions made to the political candidates or Political Action Committees in an election season, it looks small. It doesn't begin to compare. But, when those gifts are cultivated and when they are invested in the work of the Kingdom and joined with the gifts of others—then something amazing happens. The church grows and the Lord touches the lives of more people than you could ever imagine—providing safety and shelter and a home for the world, for those who need it most.”

It's interesting that I came across the parable re-write after this past political campaign – almost \$11 billion was spent. Politics aside, there was also the mock NFL draft that also just took place. At the more than 1,100 NCAA schools across all three divisions, more than \$18.8 billion was **spent** on **athletics** in 2019. Approximately \$18 million of that comes from alumni donations. Don't get me started on the professional athlete industry and what fans spend to support them.

Sometimes I cringe. I'll admit it, I covet those gifts. I often think, "shoot, if we could just get people to give to the church the way they give to their sports teams or favorite candidates, the church world wide could do even more amazing things. Here at Forest Grove, we'd wipe out our capital campaign debt, get a new steeple and elevator in no time and have more than enough to spend on missions. We would have ministries that would grow beyond our wildest dreams. If people gave like that to charities, like they do to candidates and athletics, the food banks would be full. If most churches could get their members to tithe like the Mormons or the Muslims – Muslims give more money to charity than any other religion including mainline and evangelical conservative Christians – it's hard to fathom how that might transform our lives and ministries in all of our churches. After all, how do you think they pay for all they do? It is not magic, it is math. It is through the old fashioned practice of tithing, of giving! Muslims see it as a religious obligation, ranked just after prayer in importance.

Now, I know that none of us like to talk about money and our giving. Fact is, without looking at the numbers, I wouldn't be surprised if some of you on Zoom have already checked out thinking that all the church ever does is ask for money. There are lots of people who have left the church because their pastors have spoken of it from the pulpit. But Jesus certainly talked about it. Eleven of thirty-nine parables are about money. So, forgive me if I make you uncomfortable when I dwell on such things. I certainly don't do it often because it makes me uncomfortable.

But even when we compare church contributions to those of donations given to other places, it is easy to wonder how the church can do so much with so little. I wonder if the disciples felt that way when Jesus challenged them to share the gospel of the kingdom of heaven with the whole world.

At first there were only twelve disciples. Look at who and what Jesus had to work with! In the eyes of the world, they didn't look like much. You wouldn't blame them for wondering how they might make a difference in a world dominated by Rome and a culture hostile to their message. Going up against a religious establishment that resisted them and the gospel and also ended up crucifying their leader, how could they begin to make a difference given those odds?

So, Jesus tells this parable of the mustard seed and I'm feeling better when I understand what he is saying. In fact, I'm encouraged because I realize that the seed Jesus mentions in the parable is about you and me. He is talking about his followers. *We* are the mustard seed.

As we think about stewardship, let's think about this as well. Stewardship is about money, but it is about so much more. It is about the commitment of our whole lives to work for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven. We are the seeds of that kingdom coming.

Our giving, what is put on our pledge cards, is only an outward sign of our inward commitment to Jesus and his kingdom or cause. It is an outward expression of what we, as individuals, hope God will do through us through the life of the church. We are the seeds God has sown throughout the world. We are the ones God has planted to help his kingdom grow. Each one of us is filled with great potential as we cultivate our God given potential.

That is what stewardship is really about you know, not simply sharing a percentage of our money. It's about something more than that. It's about thinking about who you are, who God has called you to be and how God has called you—yes you—to participate in the work of God's kingdom as a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Of course, this includes giving to God through the church. I want you to hear me. I'm not asking you to give to the church as an institution that is no different from other organizations. No, I'm asking you to think bigger than that. The Kirk of Kildaire Church puts in their bulletin each week: "One does not give to a church, but rather to God. We give through the church for the work of God's kingdom."

So, we are asking you to sow seeds so that God's kingdom may grow, so that we may be faithful in the part of the garden called the church where God has placed us to grow in mission and ministry.

I doubt that when Jesus told that story of the mustard seed, that even the disciples knew how much God's kingdom would grow because of their faithfulness and commitment. Do you think they ever, in their wildest

dreams imagined that their little movement would transform the whole world? But they did. And it all started with just twelve odd disciples following a rabbi in an out of the way place in the middle of nowhere.

I think about them and I think about Forest Grove as well. We started in the Elliot's living room. For sure it didn't look like much compared to the large cathedral churches of Philadelphia. But from there, you have grown. How many families have been helped? How many homeless have been housed? How many seminarians and ministers have you given birth to? How many children and youth have you spiritually fed and educated?

This is no small thing. How many mouths have been fed? How many people have been counseled by pastors? How many people have found a shelter or home in a small group or Sunday school group or youth group or just in fellowship hour following worship? How many lives have been touched by the beautiful music we offered and still offer in a different way on Zoom?

Oh, I could go on, but thanks to those of you who planted yourselves and offered your pledges of time and money—things took root around here and like a tiny mustard seed, we have grown to provide shelter and nesting far beyond our dreams.

Which leaves me with one question? It is an important one. Are we done? I don't think so. Yes, the pandemic has changed things and for many around this country, the life they once knew has ended. Businesses have closed as well as churches. We may be 167 years old, but I hope we're not done. We've only begun if you ask me! We have a future ahead of us. God isn't finished with you, me or this church of Forest Grove. God still is sowing us. Just look at how we have survived during this pandemic. We've advanced into the future along with the world by mastering the technology of Zoom. Before 2020 we thought of "zoom" as referring to Superman flying through the air or Ralph Kramden speaking to his wife Alice on the Honeymooners saying "To the Moon, Alice - bang, zoom!" We continue to have fellowship in breakout rooms and phone calls. Our deacons are still ministering to the needs of many. Our children are still being nurtured as well as our adults. We aren't just being sustained. We've got a building project that is almost completed – five years in the making, and it will be ready for us when – not if, but *when* we return to our indoor ministries. In many ways we are growing in our faith which points to the fact that God is still working here and there is a future of faithfulness and hope before us.

Like the mustard plant, it started one way, a tiny seed, but it didn't stay that way. It grew into its future as a mighty bush.

Some years back the poet and novelist Maya Angelou was giving a commencement address in California. She began her remarks with a question for the students: "How did you get here today?" She answered for them, "I'll tell you how you got here. Lots of folks, way before you were born, and way before you came of age, paid for you to get here."

Then she said, "I'll tell you how *I* got here." And she spoke of her forebears. She told of African slaves shackled in chains, huddled together, who paid for her to get there. She told about a woman in her childhood church in Stamps, Arkansas, who took time to teach Maya some manners – some culture. She told of another woman in Stamps – a dignified, elderly literary woman who invited a young Maya Angelou to tea and introduced her to Charles Dickens and gave her a copy of *A Tale of Two Cities*.

"All of these people paid for me to get here today", she said: "the slaves, Miss Culture Lady, and the old, literary woman who insisted she read Dickens."

Then, Maya Angelou spoke words that carried within them the essence of biblical stewardship and faithful discipleship. She told the graduating class, "Now you get out of here today! Get on out of here! And with your very life, pay for somebody else to get here."

Years ago, centuries ago Jesus invited people to be his disciples and to join him in sharing the good news of the Gospel, the kingdom of heaven with the world. We are here today with our faith, with our mission, here today with our building and our ministries thanks to the loving sacrifices and faithful discipleship of those who came

before us. Now, God has called us to plant our seeds for the future work of the kingdom. Our sacrifices, our offerings of time, our gifts, and our money are what God will use not only for us today or next year. Think about it. What you invest today and next year will transform the lives of others for years to come.

May God bless us and encourage to be the seeds of faith, hope, love and joy, not only here and now, but for years to come in the future. This is not only for our sake, but for the sake of those in need and for the sake of a world who needs us to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near, very near. Amen.

RECOGNITION OF THE OFFERING

DOXOLOGY

Praise God from whom all blessings flow; Praise him all creatures here below; Praise him above ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Lord, receive our gifts and our lives. Cause all of these blessings to work for you in this world which you have loaned to us for safekeeping. In Christ's Name, we pray. Amen.

MINUTE FOR STEWARDSHIP Sharon Ruth

JOYS AND CONCERNS

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

PRAYER

God of Creation, God of Wonder, hear this offering of prayer and praise as a gift from our thankful hearts. We thank you for the wonders all around us. For grains of sand, the smell of rain falling on dry ground, for the shifting of the seasons and the sound of laughter. We thank you God for one another – for the joys and struggles of relationships that nurture us and help us to grow.

God, we thank you for your eternal presence in our midst and for the good news of your deep abiding love for all of creation. Even as we give thanks, we lift up the concerns that burden us this day. We ask your peace and blessing on all those we have named in this place today and all whose names and circumstances remain in the safe sanctuary of your Spirit's care.

We pray for all who are suffering in body, mind or spirit and for all who provide care for the needs of others. We pray for the lonely and the despairing...for those who struggle with addiction...for those who feel trapped in situations of abuse...for those who making difficult decisions in life...for those who are grieving...for those who are ill...for those who are angry and fearful...

God we pray for your church and its mission in the world. Bless all of your children God, and pour your Spirit upon us, bringing healing, comfort and strength wherever it is needed. All this we ask in the name of the One who calls us forward in faith, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

HYMN #714

1. God of the fertile fields, shaper of earth that yields our daily bread:
forth from your bounteous hand come gifts your love has planned, that all in every land be clothed and fed.
2. We would be stewards true, holding in trust from you all that you give;
help us in love to share, teach us like you to care for people everywhere, that all may live.
3. As grows the hidden seed to fruit that serves our need, so your reign grows.
Let all our toil be used, no gift of yours abused, no humble task refused you love bestows.
4. God of the countryside, dear to the Christ who died to make us one:
we pledge our lives anew in faithful love to you. Guide all we say and do. Your will be done.

BENEDICTION

Go forth to proclaim God's constant love. Live out that love for everyone we meet. Go forth to unfold God's Word to the world. Gather up the tears of those around you, as you offer the healing grace of Jesus. Go forth to tell stories of hope and peace. Spread the Spirit of life all around you. 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.

Sunday November 15, 2020 - ANNOUNCEMENTS

SUNDAY SCHOOL TODAY - Join us today for Sunday school class for all ages at 11:30am on Zoom: <https://zoom.us/j/127591875>. For one half hour our children will be hearing stories, singing songs, engaging in activities and games about God and God's teachings.

Advent Study and the coming of the Messiah, begins Thursday November 19 at 7pm on Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/127591875> Meeting ID: 127 591 875 or by phone: 301-715-8592 or 253-215-8782. Led by Su Fall and Ryon Herin.

CHURCH COOKBOOKS - Forest Grove Presbyterian Church Cookbooks are available for purchase for \$15. Call the church office with your order. Remember, the holidays are coming and this would make a great gift. All proceeds will go toward the repair of our leaking steeple.

2020 ADVENT SEASON

Saturday, November 28: ZOOM ADVENT WREATH MAKING PARTY. Each Advent Sunday during worship we light candles on our church Advent wreath. This year we will be inviting those worshipping with us a home to join in this ritual as we all light the candles on our own wreaths together during the service. To do this, all are invited to make their own wreath. We are going to make a party of this by Zooming our collective creativity at 4:00 Saturday afternoon. **If you would like to receive an Advent wreath making kit, please contact the office no later than Tuesday, November 17.** Not everyone will need all the items in the kit so here are the possibilities. When you reserve your kit, please indicate which items you will need:

- a metal tray to serve as the wreath base
- floral wet foam oasis
- live greens
- four candle pillars (candle pillars replaces the need for a wire circular candle holder for tapers)



Kits will be labeled and available at the church anytime from November 22-25 or for a donation, we will deliver to your home.

Sunday, December 6 – “Ugly” Christmas Sweater during Worship. Wear your favorite or most bizarre Christmas sweater during worship and Pastor Su will use these images to describe the meaning of Christmas.

Saturday, December 12, 6:30 PM – Carol Sing and Bonfire at the Ruth farm. Christmas Carols are among the most beloved songs for many people. We will gather outside and sing around a bonfire (socially distanced – if you have experienced a Ruth bonfire you know that isn't difficult) the joy and promise of the season. S'more kits will be available for a special treat along with hot chocolate. Feel free to bring your own thermos if you would prefer. Rain date: December 13 at 6:30. Ruth Farm address: 831A Pineville Rd., New Hope, PA

Sunday, December 20 – Sharing Favorite Christmas Songs/Poems/Readings during Worship. Everyone is invited to share by recording a sacred Christmas song (vocal or instrumental), poem or reading. You can either record yourself on your computer or iPhone, or Pastor Su will record you on Zoom. The recordings will then be

edited together to create a montage of the “Birth of the Savior” that will be presented during the worship service that morning. Please contact Pastor Su if you would like to participate.

In our thoughts and prayers: Linda Bowers, Aleena Lang,
Natalie Pizza, John and Sally Thiessen, Bill Wark, Marilyn Cook