

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
WILLMAR, MN
JULY 19, 2020**



Prelude

Preparing Our Hearts

“Holy Is His Name”

words and music by John Michael Talbot

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My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
and my spirit exalts in God my Savior.
For He has looked with mercy on my lowliness,
and His name will be forever exalted.
For the mighty God has done great things for me,
and His mercy will reach from age to age.
And holy, holy; Holy is His name.

He has mercy in ev'ry generation,
He has revealed His power and His glory.
He has cast down the mighty in their arrogance,
and has lifted up the meek and the lowly.
He has come to help His servant Israel,
He remembers His promise to our fathers.
And holy, holy; Holy is His name.
and holy, holy; Holy is His name.

Welcome to Worship

Friends, we are doing worship in a new way during this season. The sanctuary is empty, but we are still the church. The church has always been the people, not the building in which we gather. Even if we cannot be together in this place, we are together in worship today by the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and by the digital signal that helps us connect to one another.

Wherever you are, and whether you are watching it live or as a recording, this is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Opening Prayer

Sisters and Brothers,
all who are led by the Spirit of God
are children of God.
We did not receive a spirit of slavery
to fall back into fear,
but we received the spirit of adoption.
Let us then confess our sin
with the freedom of children who know
how deeply they are loved.

**Abba, Father,
where we are in bondage to sin, set us free;
restore us as your children
and joint heirs with Christ.
You are our hope.
Lead us in the way everlasting. Amen.**

My fellow children of God,
do not fear,
for our God is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love
and faithfulness.
God's hand shall lead us and hold us fast.
So be reconciled with God and at peace with one another.

Opening Hymn

“Better Is One Day”

words and music by Matt Redman

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How lovely is Your dwelling place, O Lord almighty.
For my soul longs and even faints for You.
For here my heart is satisfied within Your presence.
I sing beneath the shadow of Your wings.

Chorus:

Better is one day in Your courts, better is one day in your house,
better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere.
Better is one day in Your courts, better is one day in your house,
better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere.
than thousands elsewhere.

One thing I ask and I would seek: To see Your beauty,
to find You in the place Your glory dwells.
One thing I ask and I would seek: To see Your beauty,
to find You in the place Your glory dwells. [Chorus]

My heart and flesh cry out for You, the living God.
Your Spirit's water to my soul.
I've tasted and I've seen. Come once again to me.
I will draw near to You, I will draw near to You, to You.

Better is one day, better is one day,
better is one day than thousands elsewhere.
Better is one day, better is one day,
better is one day than thousands elsewhere. [Chorus]

Scripture Lessons

Romans 8:12-25

¹² So then, brothers and sisters,^[a] we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh— ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. ¹⁵ 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!^[b] Father!” ¹⁶ it is that very Spirit bearing witness^[c] with our spirit that we are children of God, ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ 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. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; ²³ 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. ²⁴ For in^[d] hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes^[e] for what is seen? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13:24-30

²⁴ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; ²⁵ but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. ²⁶ So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. ²⁷ 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?’ ²⁸ He answered, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The slaves said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ ²⁹ But he replied, ‘No; for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. ³⁰ 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.’”

Message

“Be Patient, God Is at Work” Rev. Leanne B. Thompson

So, how do you feel about dandelions? You may be most familiar with dandelions as a stubborn weed that never seems to leave your lawn or garden. They are almost impossible to get rid of once they have taken hold. But did you know that a dandelion is more than a pesky weed? In traditional medicine practices, dandelions are revered for their wide array of medicinal properties. Moreover, from root to flower, they are edible and highly nutritious, rich in vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants. If you aren't convinced to make dandelions part of your healthy diet, consider the bees. If you ever wanted to help dwindling honeybee populations, ecologists encourage that we “learn to love our weeds” and leave dandelions alone in the Spring. They are one of the few early season pollinators, providing much needed nourishment for our honeybee friends. If none of that is enough to convince you of the dandelion's redeeming qualities, think of the children. What child do you know that isn't captivated by those yellow blooms? In the eyes of a child, dandelions are a thing of beauty. Some of the most precious bouquets I ever received were happy yellow dandelions delivered by sticky little fingers. I wouldn't trade those memories for all the perfect lawns in the world.

I brought up dandelions today because our scripture lesson is the parable of the wheat and the weeds. But make no mistake, friends, the weeds in this parable are nothing as innocent as dandelions. The weeds in this parable are a weed that in biblical times was called a *tare*. Its more modern name is *Bearded Darnel* – sometimes called *False Wheat* – and it is a devil of a weed. Bearded Darnel grows around the world but is predominately found in the Middle East. The thing that is notable about bearded darnel is that it looks strikingly similar to wheat – nearly identical, in fact – until it begins to bear seeds. It begins its life growing right alongside the wheat, indistinguishable, while it wraps its roots around the healthy plant, sucking up precious nutrients and water, making it impossible to root it out without damaging the good plant. What's more, the seeds are dangerous. At the very least they cause hallucinations, at the worst they cause death. They have been known to poison livestock and even people. Modern technology can deal with bearded darnel, separating the good wheat seed from the nasty weed seed, but no such tool existed when Jesus was telling this story.

When Jesus instructed his listeners to leave the wheat and the weeds growing side by side, he was instructing them to allow something life-giving and something irredeemably destructive to coexist with one another. In the fields of old, there may not have been a choice. But Jesus wasn't talking about fields. He was talking about the church. And that, friends, gives us something to talk about.

The first important thing we can take away from this parable is the truth that the church on earth is a mixed body of two kinds of disciples: some of us are wheat and some of us are weeds and you can't always tell us apart by looking. The church is a community of Jesus called to imitate Jesus, but the church will never be fully pure. Some of us imitate Jesus better than others, throwing our whole selves into learning to follow our Lord and Savior. Our faith becomes a way of life and peace, patience, kindness and all that other good fruit just flow out of us. For some of us, imitating Jesus is more like wearing a mask: we look good on the surface, but it doesn't go beyond skin deep. We are just really good at pretending at peace, patience, and kindness. There are really good people and there are really good masks, and we really can't tell who is who. Which is why this parable cautions against a rush to judgement. Things are not always as they seem. And things may not always be the way they are. You see, in God's kingdom, transformation is possible. Weeds, with enough time and enough nurture, can become wheat. The transforming love of Christ can begin to permeate beyond the surface and change us from the inside out.

But this parable shines the light on our preoccupation with who is in and who is out. We want it to be clear and we want to surround ourselves with other good wheat and not put up with the weeds. So, we try and define who the weeds are – for ourselves, so we can be certain we aren't those weeds. It is easier to surround ourselves with people who are just like us – the same socioeconomic class, the same education level, the same interpretation of scripture, the same political party, the same cultural experience, the same skin color – but that is not the church. The church is and always has been the messiness of human diversity. Which means the church will always be messy and imperfect. The church will always be people who are works in progress. And in our rush to define categories of belonging we make the error of naming someone a weed who God calls wheat. We call someone a weed who God calls wheat. Shame on us. Jesus just warned us not to do that. It is not our job to determine who is within and who is beyond. It is our job to welcome everyone and imagine everyone as belonging to God. You might be the first person who

encounters another child of God and treats them like wheat instead of weeds. It might just be your love, in Christ Jesus, that shows them that they are a beloved child of God, worthy of love and belonging. It might be you, treating them like wheat, that helps them become wheat!

But here is the second important thing to take away from this parable today. We might need to stop worrying about someone else's life and start paying attention to our own, because sometimes our own lives resemble the farmer's infested field. We are not always clearly wheat or weed. Sometimes each of us is a nice big mess of both. Anglican Priest Nicky Gumbel is quoted as saying: "Stop looking for the perfect church. It does not exist. Even if it did exist, the moment we joined it, it would no longer be perfect!" None of us are perfect. We are all a little weedy. But it is so much easier, so much less painful, to point out the weeds in others than to own up to our own failings.

That is why there is so much hope and comfort in this parable. Jesus is not judging us on who we are right now. Jesus is loving us into becoming someone new. Jesus is loving us into growing and changing. Jesus is loving us into becoming more compassionate and selfless. It is not always easy. Some days are definitely two steps forward and one step back. Or one step forward and three steps back. But Jesus is giving us time. Jesus is giving us time to learn from our mistakes, and time to give and receive love and encouragement from our neighbors, and time to grow more in his image. Jesus is giving us time for the wheat to win out over the weeds. The church is not perfect and each of us who are individually members of it are not perfect, but we are all getting better together.

I don't know about you, but I am thankful for the extra time. Some days it feels like I have a lot to learn, and I can use all the time I can get to keep practicing. And sometimes? Sometimes I've had enough. You see, the consequence of this growing is that we must coexist with the weeds in our own life and in each other. And sometimes I have just had it up to here with the weeds in my own life – weeding is hard tedious work. And sometimes I have had all I can stand of my neighbor's weeds, and I could really care less if my weeds are bothering them. And then I remember Paul's loving reminder to the Romans: "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.”

We are all groaning – all of us wheat and weeds – waiting for God to fix this. And God has promised that God will fix this. For the sake of this hurting and impatient world God will ultimately act to redeem and restore. But its not time yet. We must be patient for just a little longer. We must endure for just a little longer. God hasn’t forgotten about us. God isn’t ignoring our cries for help. But we need to be patient, God is at work, giving more time for weeds to become wheat – in our lives or in someone else’s life.

So, we wait, and we pray, and we love as well as we possibly can in Christ’s name. We wait patiently, and while we wait, we do our best to tend good fruit in our own lives and look for the good in others – we might just discover that what we think is a weed is something precious and beautiful.

Alleluia! Amen.

Hymn of Affirmation

“There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”

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There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,
like the wideness of the sea.

There’s a kindness in God’s justice,
which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth’s sorrows
are more felt than up in heaven.

There is no place where earth’s failings
have such kindly judgement given.

For the love of God is broader
than the measures of the mind.

And the heart of the Eternal
is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more faithful,
we would gladly trust God’s Word,

and our lives reflect thanksgiving
for the goodness of our Lord.

Prayers of Intercession

Mother-Father God,
that you for making us daughters and sons,
coheirs with Christ,
sisters and brothers of one another,
bearing witness with the Spirit
that we are the children of God.

We pray for the whole church,
that in the field of this world,
it may be the good seed
that grows into your harvest.

We pray for your whole creation
that is waiting in eager longing to be set free
from everything that holds it in bondage.

We pray for earth's people
its nations and leaders,
that all may come to know the ways
that lead to peace.

We pray for those who are ill and
for those who are facing death,
that they may find hope in the faith
that the sufferings of this present time
are not worth comparing with the glory
to be revealed to them.

We pray for those we know and love,
that they may see the bond between them and you
and that, wherever they go,
you are with them.

Blessed are you, eternal Presence,

who, with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit,
lead us to life everlasting.

Amen.

And now, with the confidence of the children of God,
we pray the prayer which Jesus taught us:

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.

Invitation to the Offering

Friends, we cannot pass an offering plate online. I want to thank you for continuing to give generously, sending your offerings to the church. Your gifts allow us to continue to be the church. And now, for your convenience, you can give online by visiting our website. So, I would like to take this moment to say thank you, and to bless the offerings you make on a regular basis: your financial gifts; and your lives offered to God's service. Let us pray...

Offering Prayer

Loving and ever-present God,
receive these tithes and offerings,
our worship,
and our lives to your service;
in Jesus' name. Amen.

Closing Hymn

"Shout to the North"

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Men of faith, rise up and sing
of the great and glorious King.
You are strong when you feel weak;

in your brokenness complete.

Chorus:

Shout to the north and the south;
sing to the east and the west.
Jesus is Savior to all,
Lord of heaven and earth.

Rise up, women of the truth.
Stand and sing to broken hearts
who can know the healing power
of our awesome King of love. [Chorus]

We've been through fire; we've been through rain;
we've been refined by the power of your name.
We've fallen deeper in love with you.
You've burned this truth on our lips. [Chorus]

Rise up church with broken wings;
fill this place with songs again
of our God who reigns on high;
by God's grace again we'll fly. [Chorus]

Charge and Benediction

Go forth as beloved children of God,
living in hope
and confident in God's promises.

May God our parent,
Christ our brother,
and the Spirit who gives us breath
bless you and keep you
this day and forevermore.

Alleluia! Amen.