



**Grace Lutheran Church, State College, PA**

**Rev. Carolyn K. Hetrick**

**6<sup>th</sup> Sunday After Pentecost, July 12, 2020**

**Sermon Title: "Seeds of Joy"**

**Sermon Texts: Isaiah 55:10-13; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

**Our daughter Alexandra got married this weekend! As you might imagine this past week had me reminiscing. I remembered when she was going to begin preschool in a Montessori school, we toured in the spring before we sent her. The classroom was vibrant and buzzing with lush plants and animals, lots of colorful stations and exuberance. It was easy to leave there filled with joy.**

**When we came back to begin in the fall, there were just plain bare shelves with some things out.**

**It was so jarring to me- where was what I remembered? Why would anyone want to return to this?**

**It turns out that in the Montessori model, when the kids come back, some things are common and familiar, but the rest would be introduced over time, as it made sense.**

**And in its time.**

**That asked a certain amount of trust. And grace.**

**But sure enough, it was true- those words I heard as a prospective parent came to life and bore fruit over the months to come. The room became what the group there needed it to be so they could thrive. It may not have looked like I or anyone else expected, but that classroom became a place of joy.**

**It took gentle direction and tending, not only by the teachers, but the students who developed such loving care for one another. There grew a genuine desire for helping one another succeed in what was intended.**

**It was not without its hiccups, but all along, the constants were there- rituals that grounded the days- tasks that a person may have that day or week. Feed the bird, collect the papers, lead the line to the playground. Some tasks that someone may not have wanted to do, but together this group journeyed through the year.**

**They celebrated holidays and birthdays and reminded each other to it was time to clean up or come sit down.**

**There is a simple truth in there, the kind of truth that on a larger scale is what Isaiah and Jesus are getting at. A truth grounded in trust and in joy in what will grow.**

**Just as rain and snow come down. Those rather ordinary images are also images of a constant. God's way of making things burst forth and sprout. That same God gives seeds to be sown, and bread to be eaten. These simple images, tell us we can trust God's word for us- it will not return empty. We will not return empty.**

Those are some powerful words to speak to people who lost their temple, and their sense of place, uprooted in every way, where nothing seemed sure and who probably wondered if their very roots would be lost as time went by.

Powerful words to speak to the first to return to emptiness, and those who come later, to those who may never return and those who have been trying to keep it all together by themselves all along when everyone else is not there.

Though people to some degree will disagree about exactly why the exile happened for the people in Isaiah, over what period of time those in exile take to return, what we know is that major events, perhaps not fully foreseen, resulted in sending people away, separating them from much of what grounded them.

But the prophet Isaiah is not asking us to piece together a biography. Instead, we are called to an experience- that despite uncharted times, there emerges a joyous affirmation- a belief that God loves God's people.

Isaiah points to the power of such a God. A power that expands in every moment, all the way to now. These are powerful words for us too.

I've been reading a book called *Light When It Comes- Trusting Joy, Facing Darkness and Seeing God in Everything*. That's a long title but it pretty much sums up these weeks. Lo, these weeks, not as long as 70 years of the exile, have surely felt far longer than weeks. Yet, for us too, God says, "My word will accomplish what it was sent for." Jesus tells us that word is like a seed. The author writes, "the thing about the seed is that it's hidden, in the earth. It's buried. It takes a long time to grow, and at any point in the life cycle of that seed, you just might stand there and look and not see a thing."<sup>1</sup>

The same is true of our faith. Especially in this time. Maybe right now as we look around. In this process we are in as people of faith, I really wish today was a definitive moment where everything is known and every fear subsided, and every hope fulfilled. I don't really want to preach about the ebb and flow of life, or to speak a shallow platitude of faith as a journey. Right now, in my heart, I want a destination- road trip done. I want to cue the musical soundtrack that plays all our favorite hymns and we belt them out together in four part harmony.

What we get is a seed, a seed that we can't make grow how we want.

But that seed and the sun and the rain are all signs of promise. We don't know fully how they will lay out the future, and yet, they come. And in them, we participate in the miracle of life itself.

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Anderson

When I picture the seed, and then I look at you, and envision those not here in this space, but here in Spirit, I tell you that seed God gives is a seed of joy. So much so Isaiah proclaims, it's like all creation has been singing us into this place. In your best inner-Disney imagination, picture the mountains and hills singing for you, bursting forth with joy that we are here! The trees are clapping their hands, and every patch of what looked like weeds and briars, is greening up and blooming as if on cue. To fill the empty places in us as we return. And as we continue to return, and to settle and to adjust and make space for each other in this new chapter of God's story with us.

Just as God says, "my word will go out," the second verse of Isaiah sings to us- You shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace. That's God's word for us. In this new time.

That's why we come to worship- to offer up the moments we are privileged to be a part of. To consecrate them to God, and increase our capacity to see God in everything- God's work in the world and in us. And to give thanks.

Nothing can take away that joy-that love that God has planted. Jesus accomplishes what he was sent for. To be with us.

Yes, just like seeds planted, it still feels like a work in progress, but...

Here we are! And more importantly, our Lord is here!

To walk with us when we don't see everything and everyone we want.

To remind us God's word will grow this seed.

Let's keep our focus on the source of our joy

The very things that the word tells us have been with us all along and still are- the everlasting things.

The things this cross says will not be cut off:

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit- May those words grow our hearts in joy, and lead us forth in peace.