

Worship for June 13, 2021

Prelude

Welcome and Announcements

*Call to Worship 1 John 4:9-10

In this is love,
not that we have loved God,
but that God has loved us
**and sent God's Son into the world
so that we might live through him.**

Prayer

**All powerful God,
in Jesus Christ you turned death into life,
and defeat into victory.
Increase our faith and trust in him,
that we may triumph over all evil,
relying on the strength of the same Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, forever and ever. Amen.**

Hymn In the Bulb There Is a Flower (Hymn of Promise) *Glory to God 250*

Prayer of Confession

**Almighty God,
you love us fully, completely,
but, we have not loved you with our whole selves.
You call, but we do not listen.
We walk away from neighbors in need and we condone prejudice, conflict, and greed.
God of grace,
help us admit our sins, that we may turn from indifference and ignorance,
and turn toward you, see the needs of the world, and resolve to speak with your voice and
walk in your ways. Amen.**

Take, O, Take Me As I Am *Glory to God 698*

Take, O take me as I am, summon out what I shall be.

Set your seal upon my heart and live in me. *Repeat.*

Assurance of Forgiveness

Scripture declares that God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Be at peace.

Old Testament Reading Psalm 20, 1 Samuel 15:34-16:13

Time With Our Young Disciples

Gospel Reading Mark 4:26-34

Morning Message

What a noisy spring we've had! And how surprised we've been to have it.

Five years ago we bought a house on a lot covered with trees, mostly pines, some hardwoods, a few dogwoods. When we stood in the kitchen with the realtor and looked into the forested back yard, we knew we would buy.

Oh, how we loved those trees! The way they surrounded and framed our house, the shade they provided, the birds and squirrels they sheltered, the way that large maple silhouetted the house in flaming red leaves in the fall. As one friend said, "This is a real tree house." It was a tree house. And we were happy there.

Until the storm blew through last May. In addition to the 23 diseased pines we'd just had removed, another 16, mostly hardwoods, were lost in the storm-splintered by lightning, snapped by strong wind.

Once the debris had been cleared, what remained was--there's no other word for it--our once beautifully wooded lot was ugly. It was bare and it was ugly.

Last summer and fall were difficult. No green canopy of shade in July. No brilliant red backdrop in October. I did plant a few trees in November, most of them little more than twigs. Another package of twigs arrived in March. I planted those, too.

I planted the twigs because it seemed like the right thing to do. In truth, though, I had no idea what would happen with them. The decimation of our yard felt so complete, it was hard to imagine it coming to life again.

As spring approached, I wondered what it would be like. What would, what could come back to life? What would become of all those twigs I planted? What would spring be like this year after the storm?

Spring this year has been noisy. And colorful. And surprising. Not only have nearly all the trees I planted blossomed or spouted leaves, but 8-10 hardwood trees, mostly maples, have sprung up out of nowhere. The birds who left for a time have returned. The squirrels who searched frantically all fall for new places to hide their acorns are as fat and sassy as they used to be. Parts of our yard still look desolate, but there is so much more life there than I ever knew, more life than I ever dreamed of.

According to the gospel writer, my blooming, noisy, vibrant yard is what the kingdom of God is like. Seeds are planted--sometimes even in ugly, desolate places--seeds are planted; and, somehow--I don't know how--somehow life emerges from those seeds. Sprouts and twigs and flowers and leaves and branches. Someday, as we did with those 23 pines before the storm, someday these new, just-developing trees will have served their purpose, and they too will need to be harvested. But, today, these seeds, seedlings, and saplings are bursting with life. They are a reminder that even when things seem dead, when hope seems pointless, in deep places we cannot see or know, life is stirring, moving, growing...whether we understand it or not, the life in those seeds will burst forth in undeniable, incontrovertible ways.

That's what happened with Mr. Ballantine. The day the elderly man was shoved out of a car and deposited on the doorstep of a homeless shelter, another homeless man named Denver offered to help. In response, the drunken Ballantine spat out curses and racial slurs. Denver helped him anyway.

Even more than he hated people of color, Mr. Ballantine hated Christians...so much so that he would rather have starved than endure chapel sermons to obtain a free meal at the shelter. When Denver went through the serving line, he'd always get a second plate and take it upstairs to Mr. Ballantine.

Denver continued taking meals to Ballantine even after the older man had been moved to a government-run nursing home two miles away. When Ballantine's room was messy and unclean, as it often was, Denver cleaned the room and its occupant. Each time he came to visit, Mr. Ballantine cursed Denver and called him names.

One day a friend went with Denver to visit Mr. Ballantine. He asked the old man if he could get him anything. "Ensure and cigarettes," the man said. Denver and the friend went to a nearby drugstore to purchase the items. The friend sent Denver back to the nursing home alone.

Here's how Denver relates his conversation with Mr. Ballantine in the book titled *Same Kind of Different As Me*:

When I went back to Mr. Ballantine's room, he asked me who paid for the cigarettes and I told him Mr. Scott. "How am I going to pay him back?" he asked. I said, "You don't." "Why would that man buy me cigarettes when he doesn't even know me?" "Cause he's a Christian." "Well, I still don't understand. And anyway, you know I hate Christians."

I didn't say [anything] for a minute, just sat there in a ole orange plastic chair and watched Mr. Ballantine lyin there in his bed. Then I said to him, "I'm a Christian."

I wish you coulda seen the look on his face. It didn't take but a minute for him to start apologizing for cussin Christians all the time I'd knowed him. Then I guess it hit him that while I'd been takin care of him--it was about three years by then--he'd still been callin' me names. "Denver, I'm sorry for all those times I called you [names]," he said. "That's okay."

Then I took a chance and told Mr. Ballantine that I'd been takin care of him all that time, 'cause I [knew] God loved him. "God's got a special place prepared for you if you just confess your sins and accept the love of Jesus."

I ain't gon' kid you, he was skeptical. Same time, though, he said he didn't think I'd lie to him. "But even if you aren't lying," he said, "I've lived too long and sinned too much for God to forgive me."

He laid there in that bed and lit up one a Mr. Scott's cigarettes, starin' up at the ceiling, smoking and thinking. I just kept quiet. Then all of a sudden he piped up again. "On the other hand, I'm too...old for much more sinning. Maybe that'll count for something!"

Well, Mr. Ballantine stopped callin me [names] that day. And wadn't too long after that I wheeled him through the doors at McKinney Bible Church...We sat together on the back row, and it was the first time Mr. Ballantine had ever set foot in a church. He was 85 years old. After the service, he looked at me and smiled. "Real nice," he said. (Ron Hall and Denver Moore, Same Kind of Different As Me. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006, 162-3.)

Jesus said:

The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how.

Thanks be to God!

In the name of our God, who creates us, redeems us, sustains us, and hopes for our wholeness. Amen.

- The Rev. Dr. Kimberleigh Buchanan

Affirmation of Faith the Apostles' Creed *Glory to God p. 35*
Gloria Patri *Glory to God 581*

Sharing Our Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer and the Lord's Prayer

Presenting Our Tithes and Offerings

*Blessing
*Postlude