

**Worship on July 16, 2023** (CCLI: License Number #3156883)  
(Welcoming Elder: Stephen Knowles)

**Sunday Order of worship**

**We Gather**

- Call to worship
- Praise song – BOP 650 He leadeth me
- Prayer for worship + Lord's Prayer
- Words of Assurance
- Time for our children and youth
- Praise song – BOP 114 Emmanuel, Emmanuel

**We Listen**

- Prayer for illumination
- First reading: Isaiah 55:10-13
- Second reading: Psalm 65 (refrain 1)
- Third reading: Matthew 13:1:19-19, 18-23
- Sermon: Beyond good soil
- Prayer for the people of God

**We Respond**

- Offering, Doxology (BOP 79 Praise God from whom all blessings vs. 1) & Dedication
- Song for the Journey – BOP 570 I have decided to follow Jesus

**We Serve**

- Benediction

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As we come into the presence of our God, let us open our hearts and minds,  
and focus on our Lord and King.

**Responsive Call to Worship**

God's Word is a lamp to our feet;

**and a light to our path.**

God's Word is made visible in Christ;

**in him we are rooted in truth.**

God's Word is revealed through The Holy Spirit;

**and lived out in faithful service.**

Come and listen for God's Word in this time of worship.

**We wait to receive the Word of Life.**

**Praise song – BOP 650 He leadeth me**

**Prayer For Adoration and Confession**

God of wisdom, You are the light of the minds that know you, the strength of those who serve you, and rest for those who seek you. God of growth, You sow and you gather, you tend and you prune, you judge and you save. God who tends our lives, we come to you in worship, to rest from our responsibilities, to turn from our distractions, and to hand over our concerns to you.

Nourish us with your Word, so that we grow in Christ, rooted in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Faithful God, You have planted the seeds of faith in us, but we confess that we have not tended those seeds well. We fail to keep studying your Word, but we are satisfied instead with what we think it means. We consider that we already know enough, rather than pursue deeper encounters with you. Forgive us, God, when we think you have nothing more to offer us.

**This time we come to you in prayer that you taught us how to pray:** (The Lord's Prayer:)  
**Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and forever. Amen.**

### **Words of Assurance**

The Apostle Paul reminds us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. God's Spirit sets us free from the powers of sin and death. Know that you are forgiven and forgive one another in Jesus' name.

**May the peace of the Lord be with you.** Let us take few moments to greet each other and share this joy of our Risen Lord.

### **Prayer for children and youth**

God is love. And love is patient. Love is kind. Love is generous. Love takes joy in truth. Love bears all things. Love is plentiful. Love is wasteful. God, you love us in these ways. Help us love our precious children and youth like you love us. Help us remember your love whenever we are with our children and youth. They grow up with love. They become stronger with love. They form healthy inner selves with love. Give us love, so we can love them, so we can raise them with your love. Also, teach them your love, so they are fascinated by your unfailing, unending, and generous love. We thank you for DJ for taking care of Sunday children's church during the summer. We appreciate the baking activities. As we enjoy the goodies, help us remember and pray for our children and youth and for our church school. Like you have generous love for us, help us generously love our next generations. In playful environment, help them enjoy you and learn how to honour and worship you. Thank you for your grace and love. In Jesus' precious name, we pray. Amen.

### **Praise song – BOP 114 Emmanuel, Emmanuel**

### **Prayer for Illumination:**

Guide us, O God, by your Word and Spirit, so that we may see clearly the way to follow you and have the courage to live by your truth revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

**First reading: Isaiah 55:10-13**

**Second reading: Psalm 65:1-13 (refrain 1)**

**Third reading: Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

**“This is the word of the Lord / Thanks be to God.”**

**SERMON: Beyond good soil**

**Today's sermon title is “Beyond good soil.”**

There is a farmer. **(PIC)** He wakes up in the morning. He grabs his sack of seeds. He goes out and spreads out the seeds. If you were this person, where would you scatter your seeds?

In today's passage, a farmer went out to sow. Where does this sower scatter his seeds? **(PIC)**

If I were a farmer, I would specifically sow my precious seeds on good soil only. But, this person from our passage doesn't seem to care. This person spreads out seeds everywhere. On a pathway, on the rock, amid thorn bushes, and good soil. If one does this, this person cannot make a good business. He is wasting a lot of seeds. This person must know that he wouldn't be able to harvest from other places compare to the good soil. Then we have question in our minds. Why does he do this?

One of the commentators writes, **"Maybe he does so in order to remind us that the gospel might be bigger than good business principles, bigger than just good soil."**

This sower just throws seed just anywhere in order to suggest that **"anywhere" is the arena of God's care and redemptive activity.** Everywhere in the whole world, God can work!

What if we express four different soils in human form? **(PIC) – 4 ppl**

Behold, a sower went out to sow.

Some fell along the path, and the birds ate it up. There is no peace, always empty, always seeking, always angry, not satisfied.

Some fell on rocks, some fell on thorns. They grew, but can't take root deeply and withers away. They grew, but they are choked by the thorns. Low self-esteem, always pessimistic, always powerless. Depressed easily. Not able to speak out. Not able to bring out the possibilities in oneself.

If you are one of the three bad soils, then are you hopeless?

Only this good soil can flourish? Only this good soil person can enjoy the presence of God, the power of God, the guidance of God, the grace of God, the mercy of God, and the love of God?

Then, did we choose the soil? Can we choose what soil we can become?

If you are depressed, do you choose to be? If you have too much worry, do you choose to worry? Of course, you know, the worries you have cannot change anything. But, sometimes, we cannot help ourselves worrying. We cannot stop. We didn't choose it.

If you are easily tempered? If your heart is dry? Don't you know that you need to love others? You make choice to love others, but your heart cannot. It might be your innate nature or because of your upbringing or because of the current situations. Even if you didn't choose what soil you have become right now, you happen to be who you are. You happen to have what you have in your heart.

What if, like a business man, God plants seeds only on good soils? Then, what about the people like those three soils? If you have temper, for example, would God say, **"Nah, you are not gonna bear much fruit, so I am not gonna take care of you."** (NEXT slide) Then, we cannot say God is love. God never neglects anyone. God would never say that to anybody.

**This Sower is prodigal.** He is wasteful. He is wasting 75% of his seeds. Some are eaten by birds. Some withers because the root cannot go deep because of rocky soil. Some grew a bit, but cannot grow anymore because they are surrounded by thorns. If you were the farmer, wouldn't you know what will happen when you sow your seeds on the pathway, on the rocky road, or on

the thorn bush? Of course, it is very very obvious. Not productive. But, he still sows his seeds on everywhere.

Try to look into your heart. Are you always good soil?

What about the time you became too dry and barren like a pathway? Then, God's care doesn't reach you? What if you were like a rocky road, then, God's love cannot find you?

What if you had too much worry like thorn bush, then, God hides his face from you?

I initially titled today's message **"Cultivate the garden of your heart."** I was going to preach on how to become good soil. But, can we change ourselves?

Yeah, of course, we can spend time with God, we can read our Bible, we can pray, we can spend time with godly people. We can do good works. But, if we can change our hearts, how long will that last? If we are able to do whatever we want to do and whatever we need to do, then, what about the power of God? Can we truly change ourselves?

In this parable, the focus is not on the seeds or the soils. **The focus of this parable is on the sower. God is a prodigal God.** He pours out his love and grace upon all kinds of people, all kinds of soils. If God chooses the good soils only, who can come before the presence of God? God is holy and sinless. God cannot be with sin. Then, if our hearts become like rocky, thorny, or dry soils, then we cannot come to God. **God's prodigal love reaches everywhere** whether we are dry, angry, depressed, confused, sad, worried, tired, even unbelieving.

**(PIC) – 4 ppl** Then, do we just live just as we are? Just like thorn bush? Hurting people around us? Just like rocky road? Dry and empty all the time? Or a pathway? Received the gospel but lose it so quickly?

There are times we are like those unfruitful conditions. At that time, are we supposed to be grateful where we are at and settle down our lives, put down our hope and dream in thorny, rocky, and well-worn pathway? My answer is no. No one is good soil for ever. No one is thorny all the time. No one is rocky or dry like a pathway all the time. Due to many different reasons, our hearts experience changes. These four people with different soils inside could be one person. Have you experienced different states of your heart? I have.

This message is about God wastefully pours out his love and energy for us no matter where we are and no matter how we are doing.

Which soil are you right now? Which soil were you last year? Which soil do you hope to be next week? We all experience all kinds of different soils in hearts in our daily life.

I have built a morning routine. I read my meditational book. I pray. And I read the Bible. It takes about 30-40 minutes. I do this every day. However, do I want to do it every day? Sometimes, I come to my desk and open the book gladly. But, many days, I have to drag myself to it. Why? I am not a good soil every day.

Every Sunday, when you come to church, how excited or happy are you? I am sure that some of you had to pull yourself so hard to come and sit here. That's because we are not good soil all the time.

If God only cares for the good soils like a good businessman, what about the time we are not good soils? We are our own? No. God never leaves us alone.

God wastefully lavishly pours out his love upon us when we are a pathway when birds came to us and take away God's invitation, when we are like rocky road when we receive God's love but lost it so quickly, and when we are like thorny bushes when we are willing to follow God's steps, but soon, we are caught up with our worries and situations.

Our God does not want to make business out of us. Our God does not have to make profit from us. Our God has something to do for us even when we are not ready. Our God is working in us and for us all the time. Our God always opens his arms for us, so that we can always turn to him. Let us know his love. Let us accept his invitation of love. Whenever we are and wherever we are and whatever we do, God's love is for us. God never gives us up. God's lavishing love is always for us. Live in his love and slowly and gradually, let's turn ourselves to God.

This is the message of the Lord for us today. Let us pray.

### **Prayer for the people of God**

God, you are a prodigal God. You pour out your love upon a dry land, upon thorny bushes, upon a rocky road. We are, many times, turning away from you. But, you still, love us faithfully. You never try to save your love or energy. You don't think about efficiency. You never choose some specific people to care for. God, you always lavishly flood down your love upon us. Change our hearts O God. Our hardened hearts, our barren hearts may be changed because of your love. Change our lives, so we may follow you obediently and gladly. We are not like good soils all the time. So, God, help us remember how you are interested in us, how you are faithful to us, how you are present in our daily lives.

We remember the people in our church body. Like the picture we had, we experience different stages of our minds. Whenever we feel we are not ready for you, help us know that there's no such things. Because you are always ready for us, help us remember that we can always turn to you. There might be some people whose minds are barren, dry, thorny, sad, depressed, not happy, empty, resentful, and many other difficult emotions and feelings. Gracious God, whichever conditions we experience, we are yours. We are still your precious children. You are still faithful in loving us and caring for us and waiting for us. Make sure that our faith is not up to us, but it's up to your love and grace for us. Heal the sick. Reconcile our brokenness. Give strength to the weak. Shine your light upon our darkness.

Restore the joy of your salvation, so we can reflect your light to our surroundings.

Dwell in our hearts and restore your image you originally created us.

We believe you love us and have special plans for each of us. And this life is a journey walking toward you. Hold our hands and walk with us all the time. In Jesus' precious name we pray.

Amen.

**Invitation to the offering:** This is the time for offering. We see growth in the gardens around us and remember that the seed of God's Word bears fruit in each life it touches. The gifts we offer today help to sow the seeds of God's Word throughout the world God loves. As we offer our gifts to God, let us praise God and glorify him.

### **The Doxology (BOP 79 Vs. 1)**

#### **Offering prayer:**

God of growing seeds and souls, we offer our gifts in thanksgiving for your kindness to us. Bless and multiply them to add to the abundance of your love at work in the world. Make them seeds of new life to inspire faith in souls they touch in Jesus' name. Amen.

### **Song for the Journey – BOP 570 I have decided to follow Jesus**

Now, it is the time for us to be sent to the world. We will experience bad times and good times. There are times of emptiness and times of fullness. These are not up to us. These times are up to

God. We are to just remember that God is at work in our lives. Barren times, and plentiful times, let us stay with God and walk with him in his prodigal love.

**Benediction:** May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, And the Love of God, And the intimate fellowship of the Holy Spirit, Be with us all, now and always. Amen.