

DYING
IN ORDER TO
GROW



2021
LENT
JOURNEY
Sunday March 21st

Prelude
Introduction
Invitation

Call to Worship:

We join together as the Body of Christ to grow in faith and remember Jesus' life and teachings. When we worship, we join our lives with his and seek to live faithfully in his ways. So, let us pray, hear the word, and prepare our hearts to receive, once again, the seeds of love from the One who loves us more than we could ever comprehend!

Hymn: "Jesus Calls Us," vv. 1,5 (UMH #398)

Reading the Word: John 12:20-33

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Ministry of Music

Message: "The Cost Of Bearing Fruit"

While taking a walk the other day, I was reflecting on today's scripture passage and how Jesus calls us to plant seeds and bear fruit. I found these two seeds along the way: an acorn and a pine cone. In other scriptures, Jesus told the disciples that they should have faith the size of a mustard seed, and they could accomplish great things for God in the world. All these seeds, when planted, watered, and then nurtured with the warmth of the sun grow into something bigger than themselves.

In order for the growth to happen, they must die to themselves so they may break open and become something greater that bears fruit – the fruit of an oak tree, or a pine tree, or the mustard plant.

In verse 24, Jesus. Says that a grain of wheat falling to the earth and dying is a reminder that, in Christ we are called to do the same. Through baptism, our old life is symbolically washed away, we die to the old and live into the new, which means growing in faith and sharing that faith by planting our own seeds through witnessing for Christ in the world. This isn't always easy, and we may not really believe that we can bear fruit.

Yet, we can bear fruit, regardless of the size of those seeds. We don't have to be perfect or have a special license or skill in order to plant seeds of faith. When we look at the various seeds that are planted in a garden, we can see that seeds for carrots are far smaller than for beans or squash, but, when planted they die and break open so they can grow and bear fruit.

We all can plant the seeds of love, hope, compassion, and caring in our world as we share the love of God with others. Our call to discipleship opens us to learning from the teachings of Jesus, then sharing our God-given gifts and talents in whatever way we can. We USE them to keep building God's kingdom on earth and through offering whatever seeds we can. The point is to USE them!

There are many of us who don't think we have enough faith, but if we have even a small seed, we really DO have enough, because ultimately, we plant the seeds and God works through them and through us to make a difference in our world. Whatever size our faith, all we have to do is live it and believe that we can share it because of God at work in us.

A good example is from the Wizard of Oz. The Scarecrow, Tin Man, Lion, and Dorothy all believed that someone else had the answers and would give them what they need. As they journeyed through the land of Oz, defeated the wicked witch, and appeared before the Great Oz, they realized, as Oz told them, that they already had all those things inside them. All they had to do was exercise their ability to use them. (Idea from Lindy Black).

Living our faith means that we stop worrying about all the things we AREN'T doing and concentrate on what we are ABLE to do. As a congregation, we can accomplish great things for Christ, and we already are doing this in a number of ways! But there often are self-esteem challenges for smaller churches. Maybe we don't believe we can

accomplish much because we don't have enough people or enough participation, but believing that might sabotage us in to defeating ourselves before we have even tried.

Rev. Anthony Robinson wrote:

I get to work with all sorts of congregations all across the country. I am regularly stunned. Stunned at their incredible faithfulness, at the love I see, at the acts of service and the amazing perseverance of the church and people of the church. The media is blind to this. Worse, we too are often blind to the goodness and faithfulness unfolding week by week in our own congregation. But in every congregation I visit I see love and faith, service and perseverance. I see the poor fed, the children taught, adults seeking deeper lives, strangers welcomed, love lived and God praised. Church, you're amazing. (Still Speaking Daily Devotional, UCC, October 1, 2010).

Church, you're amazing! Do we believe that? I see incredible faithfulness here and in so many churches. I see perseverance and hard work, not just so we will survive, but so we will thrive! We only need to believe in God's call - God's vision for us! Jesus asks us to exercise our faith - to believe that we can do great things for God. Jesus asks us to drop seeds of faith everywhere we go by living out our faith. We are partners with God, actively living our faith in order to further the Kingdom of God here on earth. When we pray, we stand hand-in-hand with God, listen to God's direction, and open ourselves to knowing which direction God is pointing us.

We can be a voice for the voiceless, speak for those who are being oppressed, who are victims of discrimination because of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, or age. This past week, the news from Portland, Maine reported a story about a woman of Asian descent who was sitting in her car with her two children in the back, when a man came up and hollered at her, "Go back to where you came from!" Then he kicked her car, smashing the driver's side mirror. We also heard this week, about murders in Atlanta, all aimed at Asian run businesses when eight people were murdered. Our call is to stand in solidarity with those who are being abused, threatened, and harmed.

Jesus calls us to plant seeds and bear fruit. It isn't always easy or comfortable, and it certainly is challenging. But we need to remember that Jesus doesn't let us off easily. Verse 20 says, "Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, God will honor." Our work of seed planting and bearing fruit is a life-long process of learning, growing, and persevering for Christ. There are many ways to do this, according to the gifts we have been given.

Maybe this week we will take time to stop and spread our seeds of faith, whatever they may be. Maybe this week we will call that lonely person, send a get well or sympathy or birthday card. Maybe this week we will smile at someone in the check-out line or let someone with just a few items go in front of us. Maybe this week we will give a compliment or pat on the back to someone who could really use one or check in with someone we haven't seen for a while. Maybe this week we will offer expressions of kindness and hospitality to someone we don't even know.

Maybe this week we will plant seeds by giving someone a Bible or send them a daily Bible verse to read, teach children to pray, promise to pray for someone, or, even better, pray with them. There are so many seeds that are small and, when planted, will grow through the love and grace of God. Following Jesus means giving up our attempts to control things, but it also means gaining so much more as we live in partnership with Jesus and each other, as we carry on the ministry to which we have been called.

What seeds do you have to share? Where will you plant your seeds this week? This month? This year? This life-time? Let us grow in faith, plant seeds, and bear fruit as Jesus' disciples. Amen

Prayer:

Holy God, we know that you call us to give our lives to your service. When we serve you, we are called to bear fruit. Our work is to plant seeds, to nurture them, and to share our faith with others; and when we do that, we are giving of ourselves for you. Help us to know that when we offer ourselves, we must let go of things that stand in our way of growing in faith. Remind us that, when we let go, we are set free to bear fruits of kindness, compassion, caring, and love. Thank you for your continuing guidance and direction in our lives. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Hymn: "Make Me a Servant," (sing twice) (FWS #2176)

Blessing



WE LIFT UP IN PRAYER

Jen Patria
Naomi
Erin Frane
Jim Slater
Charles Gilman
Barbara Clement

Harry Junkins
Sophia
Barbara Glidden
Bobbie Noble
Dan Strange
Danny Westbrook

Juliann

The family of Jeanne Westcott
The family of Bill and Gayle Gardei
Jen - Stebbins daughter-in-law
Those in nursing and assisted living care
Front line workers
Our Denomination
Our Country
Our Church family
Those who have lost loved ones to COVID



WHO WE ARE

FUMC PORTSMOUTH A RECONCILING CONGREGATION

We, the congregation of the First United Methodist Church of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, are dedicated in worshipping, learning, and serving with all people as we embrace Jesus Christ's message of love and acceptance. As a United Methodist Church we stand fully behind the statement "Open Hearts, Open Minds, and Open Doors". We celebrate our diversity and invite all persons regardless of age, gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, marital or socioeconomic status, nationality, physical or mental ability into full membership and participation in the life of this community of faith.



One way to make a donation to FUMC is to point your phone camera on QR code and it will guide you through the process... thanks for making a difference.



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