

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

This is a great day! The sun is shining. Technology is working as it should we are able to worship together. As pastor, I want to thank each of you for being present today and I also want to thank those gathering outside.

I had been looking forward to this morning very much. In fact, I even had purchased a special face mask to wear with our brothers and sisters outside. So, while I am not with them, you all get to see firsthand that mask. The reason I am alone today is that Friday evening, I developed a low-grade fever of 99.5 degrees, which only lasted a short time. It was accompanied by a minor sore throat. Other than that, I felt fine. The fever did not return Saturday. In a world without COVID-19, I would not have thought twice about being present with our brothers and sisters outdoors this morning; however, as we know everything has changed in recent months. With that said, I made Del aware of the fever and also decided merely from a precautionary standpoint to not lead worship this morning citing our guidelines for in-person worship or any other employee to not attend if experiencing a variety of symptoms that could be associated with COVID-19.

While saddened, I am joyful because I am not alone. Months ago, I probably would have resigned myself to sitting at home; however, now God has showed us a new way of being church together and this morning my sorrow about not being to gather with those just outside this space is transformed into joy because I can still be with all of you and together we continue to be the beautiful body of Christ in the world. This is our mission! To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ! To produce fruit – an abundant harvest of the seeds sown through the hands of a loving divine farmer. Fruit that reflects the light and love of Jesus Christ.

Last week, we heard Jesus tell us a story about a sower that continues to sow seed extravagantly and abundantly. A sower that is at work in the world continuing to bring about new life. In the parable Jesus delivers today, we hear him proclaim he is the patient sower who allows the good seed of wheat grow alongside the weeds sown by the evil one. Yet, this patient and grace-filled sower foresees that an abundant harvest will still be had.

Jesus reminds us there is an ongoing struggle in the world between good and evil, but God will win the decisive victory. Jesus also reminds those faithful servants of the sower their job is not to be the judge of whether one is wheat or weed.

No, that is the sower's job. "Relax," Jesus seems to say. "I've got this." You just go and do what the work I have called you to.

Jesus continues to paint a portrait of kingdom life. He continues to guide his newly called disciples into their vocational life as his students. Just chapters earlier he told them what that entails -- "Proclaim the good news the heaven has come near. Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Chapter 10:7-8)

This, likewise, is our mission. There is great freedom in knowing we do not have to be the judge. Jesus takes that burden off our backs. This further equips us to focus on the mission at hand. Focus on being fed by the life-giving water Jesus offers so we can produce the fruit he so desires. Focus on loving one another as he has loved us. Focus on being Christ's church. Focus on living in grace and extending that grace to one another and the world.

Whether we worship in-person or online that mission is still the same. To proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. To be transformed through saving work of the cross and resurrection that frees us from the weeds we each harbor and in turn frees us to "shine like the sun" in our Father's kingdom and be the wheat we were created to be.

People of God, we gather this day having persevered many weeks to get here and gather in-person again. Yet, not once did we stop doing God's work. Not once did we stop giving thanks and praise to our Lord and Savior. Not once did we stop being the church. What we did is simply trust God to show us a new way of being the church in a unique moment in time. We have adapted, survived, and I believe when we are beyond COVID-19 will be stronger, closer, and more focused on our mission to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ! Amen.