**WORSHIP SERVICE SEPTEMBER 13, 2020**

**Welcome**

Good morning everyone! Welcome to our service of worship. I wish you all a happy Sunday, and I’m so glad that you have come to worship God together. Today we are actually taping in our beautiful sanctuary. So, for those of you who haven’t seen the sanctuary in a while, we’re happy that we can bring it to you today, and I’m just really grateful to be able to be here with you and here in our sanctuary. Jeff and I are following the CDC guidelines on social distancing, as he is taping about 15 feet away from me, and I’m up here. So we are practicing social distancing and I encourage you all to continue doing the same.

Today is the last day of our summer series on Jesus’ Parables that I have called “LET THE PARABLES SPEAK”. And it is fitting that as we face this time of unprecedented change in our own lives - forced on us, really, by a wave of unexpected circumstances - that our parable for today is one that addresses unexpected experiences. Today our parables will focus on the wine skins and the old cloak. And you’ll hear more about that as our service goes on this morning. So, do stay tuned to see what our parables have in store for us this morning.

We have gathered here now to worship our God with one another. Let us pray together.

**Call to Worship**

**CALL TO WORSHIP**

Adapted, Trinity United Church of Christ, Chicago, NCH #824

ONE: Beautiful are the works of God!

ALL: **Beautiful also are the skins of God’s people!**

ONE: Beautiful is the mind of God!

ALL: **Beautiful also are the hopes of God’s people!**

ONE: Beautiful is the heart of God!

ALL: **Beautiful also are the souls of God’s people!**

ONE: God made the heavens and the earth!

ALL: **To God be the glory for the things God has done.**

Let us worship together. Amen.

Musical selection: Morning has Broken

**PRAYER OF INVOCATION and LORD’S PRAYER**

**INVOCATION**

**Let us pray.**

O God, all people are your Beloved,  
across races, nationalities, religions, sexual orientations  
and all the ways we are distinctive from one another.  
We are all manifestations of your image. *We are bound together in an inescapable network of mutuality  
and tied to a single garment of destiny.*  
You call us into your unending work  
of justice, peace and love.  
Let us know your presence among us now:

Let us delight in our diversity  
that offers glimpses of the mosaic of your beauty.  
Strengthen us with your steadfast love and  
transform our despairing fatigue into hope-filled action.

Under the shadow of your wings in this hour, Holy God,  
may we find rest and strength, renewal and hope.  
We ask this, inspired by the example  
of your son, Jesus Christ in whose name we delight to pray, saying,

*Our Father, who art in heaven,*

*hallowed be 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 debts,*

*as we forgive our debtors.*

*And lead us not into temptation,*

*but deliver us from evil.*

*For thine is the kingdom,*

*the power, and the glory,*

*For ever,*

*Amen.*

**OFFERING**

Friends, we come to our time of offering before God and with one another now. I’d like to take a moment to thank you all for your generosity that has been expressed through your donations over these 6 months that we’ve been apart from one another. We are grateful for your pledges; we are grateful for your donations. If you are visiting with us today, and you would like to contribute financially to the church, you may mail your donation in to the church, at 1 So. Main St, Randolph MA, 02368, or you can go to our website at firstuccrandolph.org and there is a donate button and you just follow the prompts on that. So we’re happy to have your contributions as well. We thank you very much for your continued generosity which supports the mission and the ministry of our church.

**JOYS AND CONCERNS**

As we come to our time of prayer with one another, I’d like to ask you to continue to pray for Lee Parsons as her son Dana did pass away this past week - I believe it was a week ago Tuesday actually. And Dana was a young man. He was only in his late 50s. Dana had a stroke several months ago from which his recovery has been really really rough, and unfortunately he succumbed, to his death. And so I would ask that you keep Lee in your prayers, as well as her other son David and his lovely wife Tina.

Another person I would like to invite you to pray for is Mary Bonish. There’s actually 3 parts to this prayer for Mary. That Mary will continue with her process of treatments with her skilled physicians who are helping her through her medical situation. And I would ask you to pray for Mary’s sister Donna who has started her own chemo for breast cancer. As well as there’s another member of Mary’s family that I’ll ask you to pray for, and it’s Mary’s niece who’s had some complications from surgery. So please keep these in your hearts and in your minds as we pray today.

Thirdly, I would just say what maybe doesn’t even need to be said because we all carry this in our heart’s right now. Our country is in big trouble. We really need to continue wearing masks, social distancing, and washing our hands as frequently as humanly possible. We need to defeat this coronavirus as a people, as a country. So let us keep these all in our prayers this morning. As we come to our time before God, I also invite you to pray for yourselves. Your needs. In these 6 months of being at home and having our lives changed and disrupted in so many ways, I think that there may be a lot of needs that are going unmet right now, so I would ask you to pray for yourselves, your family, and those that you know are in need.

So let us pray.

**PASTORAL PRAYER**

Holy God, we come before you now as a people in transition. Help us to know that we are not alone and that you are the one who keeps this planet, inhabited by humankind, spinning. Remind each of us is your beloved creation.

Hear us on this new day, at the beginning of an era that is potentially fearsome and dangerous.

Forgive us as individuals, forgive us as congresses, state departments, presidents, candidates, prime ministers, parliaments, as common, ordinary citizens.

Forgive us for our reliance upon ourselves and our own resources for the management of our disagreements.

God you enter each and every country around the globe to change people’s hearts, to change all of our minds, and to change ours. Forgive us for our dependence on violence for settling our conflicts, and change us, change our hearts, oh God. Forgive our silence when we ought to speak up.

Change us from defenseless to defended, from fearful to confident, from closed to open, and from shaken to courageous, in the risk and the work of establishing peace, justice, and equality right here, and over there, and everywhere in between.

We pray that you continue to lead and guide us in our daily lives, and remind us that we can turn to you for serenity, for courage and wisdom as we put one foot in front of the other and as we do our best to seek the right things that you lay out before us.

God of love, peace, mercy, forgiveness. We pray all these things in your holy name, knowing that you are with us now, and you are with us until the end of the age. Blessings and glory be to you our God. Amen.

**SCRIPTURE Mark 2:21-22; Matthew 9:16-17; Luke 5:36**

Our scripture reading today comes from the Gospel of Matthew. And I just want to say that these - the 2 brief readings that I’m going to read for you are in 3 Gospels. They’re in Mark, Matthew, and Luke. So to be consistent, I’m gonna read the 2 that are found in the Gospel of Matthew. So I’ll start the first one, which is the new cloth on an old garment. It’s chapter 9 verse 16, and it says this.

*No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made*

The second reading is from Matthew Chapter 9, verse 17, and it says this:

*And one pours new wine into old wine skins. Otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wine skin will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wine skins.*

So ends our reading from the gospels.

**SERMON**

Today, my friends, is the conclusion of our summer series, ***“LET THE PARABLES SPEAK”.*** Since the beginning of July, I have been focused on finding and sharing a message of hope with you from these parables, these very intentional stories and teachings of Jesus.

### First there was The Good Samaritan which taught us about grace, mercy and compassion. The Samaritan went beyond expectation to care for the injured man.

### Next there was The Great Banquet. The story of the *wedding banquet* reminds us that we need to prepare ourselves spiritually to come to Jesus’ banquet table at any moment.

### The Prodigal Son, also known as The Prodigal Child, is the story of a young man who was lost and he was found. And his story reminds us that God’s joyous love is unlimited, and that God will always welcome us back into the fold when we stray.

### The Sower and the Seed was next. This story teaches us to open our hearts as good soil to God. To hear God’s Word, and to accept God’s Word, and to share God’s Word.

Next there was **The Rich Fool** which warns us against greed. Do not store up treasures for yourself on earth. Your reward will be much richer at the heavenly banquet.

**The Invited Guests** teaches us about humility and not to get carried away with self-importance.

**The Speck in Your Neighbor’s** **Eye,** you remember, was just last week. And it teaches us to examine our own thoughts and behaviors and change those things in ourselves before we even consider pointing out our neighbor’s flaw. Take the log out of our own eye and do not judge others.

### These great stories serve as guides to compassion, preparation, to stay grounded and to stay openhearted. Jesus’ parables are great stories that remind us of our need for our Savior and point us back to him in ultimate hope. These beautiful stories remind each one of us of our continuous need for God.

Today, we conclude with two of the parables, found, as I said, in three of the gospels. These two stories are paired together because they have the same message intertwined. One speaks of not trying to sew new fabric into an old cloak. The reason, actually, that you would not do that is because the fabrics will differ, and they will wear differently. They may wash differently; one may shrink and the other may fray.

Here Jesus is contrasting the old Mosaic covenant with the new covenant as foretold and revealed in the New Testament. The old covenant is a performance-based salvation, where one is saved if they live up to a certain level of performance. The new is a salvation-based performance, where one is saved through forgiveness of sins, which requires faith in Christ’s atoning word. And having been saved, in this new way, God will regenerate the person, causing them to live a life and a lifestyle consistent with that of a child of God.

This may remind us of the theological debate for which Paul is most noted. In Paul’s theological discourse, he purports that we are saved by grace (which is the new covenant); and not by works or the law (which is the old mosaic covenant). These two do not mix. The Prophet Isaiah said this in chapter 46:18

18[“Do not](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/408.htm) [call to mind](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/2142.htm) [the former things;](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/7223.htm) [pay no](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/408.htm) [attention](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/995.htm) [to the things of old.](https://biblehub.com/hebrew/6931.htm)19Behold, I am about to do something new; even now it is coming. Do you not see it? Indeed, I will make a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert.…

The second lesson, that of wine and the wine skins, has a similar message. It has a warning not to put new wine into the old wine skin. And why might say, why? Well, the fermenting of new wine builds up pressure in its container which can burst the old skins.

Biblical Christianity explodes out of the boundaries of Israel and it continues to cross all kinds of boundaries as we have seen through Jesus’ life. It cannot be contained and neither can its practices be limited to a set of commandments.

The Holy Spirit ferments the believer, helping each one to infer applications from the Bible that apply to a particular situation in our lives today. After having been fermented, believers are sometimes mistaken for drunkards as in Act 2:15, “These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning.” But they were yet ecstatic. They were exploding in their love of the life of Jesus Christ, and all the promise and the newness that came along with that.

The old covenant has finished fermenting. Not only that, but Israel has drunken it down and now all that was left was the old wineskin in which it had been contained. Its effect was completed and the fullness of time had come for the new wine (Jesus) and the new covenant.

In Galatians 3:24-25, it is written, “So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”

So, basically, these two readings are paired together to emphasis that in Jesus, the past is gone, and new has come. Our salvation is no longer dependent on performance, but it is dependent on our faith in Christ. Christ who is the forgiver of sins, the Lord, and the giver of life. And so, my friends, we are asked not to look back on the things of old, but rather to look to today and to the future, relying upon God’s grace.

Now you know that I read a lot of things on the internet. I get a lot of emails. And a lot of information comes to me over the course of a week. And so I wanted to conclude my sermon today with a story which came to me this week by a woman named Gale West. She has a daily - maybe it’s a monthly - newsletter that comes out, and it’s called:

*SUCCESS WITH SOUL; Redefinable success for a flourishing world*

So I wanted to read what she had to write, and I think that we can all relate to this story in some way, in that some of the old ways are gone, and we are invited to step into something new as she was. She suffered a stroke, and this is where she begins:

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| |  | | --- | | *It’s been almost four months since my stroke. Some say it’s a detour, others an initiation.  Whatever it is, it’s a grand disruption* [in my life]*. What I thought was going to be a sprint, in my recovery, has turned into a marathon. As I go to all my various therapies, I ache to be back to normal. But the normal I knew doesn’t exist. My brain is literally being rewired. I am in the in-between. In between the old and the new. Similarly, maybe the pandemic is a detour or humanity’s initiation. It definitely is a grand disruption on a global scale. One of historic proportions. It, too, has turned into a marathon instead of a sprint. So many of us are asking, “When will it go back to normal?” It won’t, because what we thought of as normal doesn’t exist.*  *My friend was commenting the other day, “I don’t know how I’m paying my bills. It doesn’t make sense. I keep trying to find a pattern to understand it, but I can’t. ”*  *My response was, “That’s because you are looking for patterns based on what you have known in the past. They are not there. You have to see in a new way, those patterns are outdated.”*  *It is disconcerting, to say the least, when the world as we know it is gone. As the systems break down around us, our collective and individual brains are being rewired. We are all in the in-between. In between the old and the new.*  *The truth is, big change can’t happen without disruption that’s sustained enough for a disconnect from the familiar. It’s stressful. There is grief. There is anger and frustration. There is anxiety and fear. It’s tiring, very tiring. New neural pathways take time and a lot of energy* [to develop]*.*  *In finding meaning in the experience, I have to assume there is a greater power at hand forcing me to create a life that is even better than I could know.  We have to hold the intention for the same for the world. A world that is better than we could know.* | |

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| |  | | --- | | *What has sustained me in all of this? Lingering in moments of joy! Particularly, hanging out with the ducks.* |   So, what is it for you? How are you sustaining yourself through this time of dramatic change? Our scripture tells us today that we cannot sew new fabric into the old cloak. That we can’t put new wine into the old wine skins because it will ferment and it will burst. So, my friends, I ask you, how are you being sustained? Is there anything you need? Is there any way that our church can minister to you as all of us around the world make way for the new day? Amen |
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**CLOSING MUSIC: Spirit Song**

**BENEDICTION**

Friends, as we close our time of worship together this morning, I pray that order will be restored to our broken world. I pray that God will show each and every one of us how we can contribute more to solutions. How we can contribute to a healthier world. A more peaceful world.

A world in which the lion may lie down with the lamb, in which people see one another as sisters and brothers, a world of communal sharing and caring.

Praise our God. Glory be to God. Glory be to the living Christ, in whom all things are made new. Go in peace

Amen.

I’ll see you all next time.