



Seward United Methodist Church

April 16, 2023

Gathering Music/Prelude

Megan Forbes

Welcome and Announcements

CALL TO WORSHIP

(inspired by Mark 4:26-34 Written by Nancy C. Townley)

What mysteries there are in God's world!

We, so sophisticated, stand in awe at the wonders of the natural world.

We look at the tiniest of seeds and wonder what will happen

From that small seed will grow a large shrub.

Although we consider our gifts to be small and insignificant,

God will use our gifts in miraculous ways.

Praise the God of small seeds and mighty power. Amen.

Hymn

You Are the Seed

UMH 583

You are the seed that will grow a new sprout;

You're a star and will shine in the night;

You are the yeast and a small grain of salt,

A beacon to glow in the dark.

You are the dawn that will bring a new day;

You're a wheat that will bear golden grain;

You are a sting and a soft, gentle touch,

My witnesses where'er you go.

Refrain

Go, my friends, go to the world, proclaiming love to all,
Messengers of my forgiving peace, eternal love.

Be, my friends, a loyal witness, from the dead I arose;

"Lo, I'll be with you forever, till the end of the world."

²You are the flame that will lighten the dark,

Sending sparkles of hope, faith, and love;

You are the shepherds to lead the whole world

Through valleys and pastures of peace.

You are the friends that I chose for myself,

The word that I want to proclaim.

You are the new kingdom built on a rock

Where justice and truth always reign. (R)

³You are the life that will nurture the plant;

You're the waves in a turbulent sea;

Yesterday's yeast is beginning to rise,

A new loaf of bread it will yield.

There is no place for a city to hide,

Nor a mountain can cover its might;

May your good deeds show a world in despair

A path that will lead all to God. (R)

COMMON PRAYER

(inspired by Mark 4:26-34 Written by Thom Shuman)

Holy One:

you anoint us with living water,
so we may go to serve the world
in these troubled days.

You open our eyes
so we will see everyone
as our sisters and brothers.

Seed Planter:

you place faith
deep within us,
so we can bear witness
to your just and loving kingdom.

Your love regulates our hearts,
so we can welcome all
in your name.

Gentle Spirit:

when we cannot see the way,
you take us by the hand
so we can step forward,
in faith,
into the kingdom.

You fill us with hope,
so we can sing God's joy
all of our days.

God in Community, Holy in One,
hear us as we pray as Jesus has taught us.
Amen and amen

Children's Time

Pastor Jo Ellen Axthelm

Scripture Lesson: Mark 4:26-34

²⁶ He also said, "The kingdom of God is as if someone would scatter seed on the ground, ²⁷ and would sleep and rise night and day, and the seed would sprout and grow, he does not know how. ²⁸ The earth produces of itself, first the stalk, then the head, then the full grain in the head. ²⁹ But when the grain is ripe, at once he goes in with his sickle, because the harvest has come."³⁰ He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it?"³¹ It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; ³² yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade." ³³ With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; ³⁴ he did not speak to them except in parables, but he explained everything in private to his disciples.

Hymn

The Kingdom of God

UMH 275

1 The kingdom of God is like a grain of mustard seed.
When it is sown in the earth, it is the smallest seed.

[Refrain:]

It is like the kingdom of God and a mystery.

2 For when it is sown, it grows into the largest plant,
greater than all of the herbs, and grows into a tree. (Refrain)

3 It grows so birds can rest inside its crown of leaves,
deep in its shadows, away from any evil prey. (Refrain)

4 And so we can liken it to seeds which make a tree
larger than all of the trees from just the smallest seed. (Refrain)

Sermon

Little Seeds and Big Hopes

Pastor JoEllen Axthelm

Prayer of Confession

(inspired by Mark 4:26-34 Written by Moira Laidlaw)

Lord Jesus Christ,
we remember with gratitude those people
who generously sowed the seeds of faith in our lives.

Silent Reflection

Above all, we recognize how you have blessed our lives
with the gift of the Holy Spirit
so that our faith has miraculously and mysteriously grown.

We confess the times we fail to involve ourselves
in planting any seeds of faith in the lives of others;
the times when our personal agendas become more important than yours;
the times when we have denied others the opportunity to expand their faith
through our lack of interest or involvement;
the times when our lives become so entangled with the values of the world
that we forget what you have said and done and promised.

Lord Jesus Christ, we know that when we become disconnected from you,
our lives become parched and unfruitful and our faith becomes stunted and dry.

Bless and renew our lives, we pray,
so that we remain connected to you at all times and in all places,
strengthening our faith to expand and, growing strongly and vigorously,
to bear the fruit of your mercy, your love, your undying life. Amen.

Prayers of the People

Prayer Hymn

1 In the bulb there is a flower;
in the seed, an apple tree;
in cocoons, a hidden promise:
butterflies will soon be free!
In the cold and snow of winter
there's a spring that waits to be,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

3 In our end is our beginning;
in our time, infinity;
in our doubt there is believing;
in our life, eternity.
In our death, a resurrection;
at the last, a victory,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

Hymn of Promise

2 There's a song in every silence,
seeking word and melody;
there's a dawn in every darkness
bringing hope to you and me.
From the past will come the future;
what it holds, a mystery,
unrevealed until its season,
something God alone can see.

UMH 707

Sharing Joys and Concerns
Pastoral Prayer/Lord's Prayer

Offering

Offertory
Doxology

Offertory Prayer

Lord of all bounty and blessing, the gifts we offer to you are like seeds. Some will take root nearby, and we will see them grow and bear fruit. Some will be carried far beyond where we can see, and we have faith that they will find good soil and thrive. We thank you for the privilege of being called to sow. Bless with the joy of good fruit the seed we will see and the seed we will never see. We pray this in the loving name of Jesus, gardener and savior. Amen.

To What Can the Kingdom of God Be Compared (Carolyn Winfrey Gillett)

TO GOD BE THE GLORY 11.11.11.11 with Refrain

To what can the kingdom of God be compared?
A mustard seed falls where a field's been prepared,
And there, where predictable plantings should be,
There grows up a wild bush — as big as a tree!
God of love, here on earth, hidden things still surprise:
Loving deeds ... signs of birth ... faithful, Spirit-filled lives.
Your reign is amazing, your ways still astound,
Just like that new life springing forth from the ground.

Benediction

Passing of the Peace

Postlude

Megan Forbes