

Isaiah 55:10-13; Psalm 65; Rom 8:1-11; Matt 13:1-9, 18-23  
Sixth Sunday after Pentecost – Year A – July 16, 2017

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Trinity Episcopal Church  
& Christ Church Cathedral

In June Alex Kirstukas and I attended a conference at the Institute of Sacred Music at Yale Divinity School entitled *When Dancing Turns to Mourning*. There were musicians and clergy and lay folks from all around the country in attendance. The conference focus was on how we praise and rejoice in the God who creates all things *and* acknowledge the awful things that happen in our world everyday. How do we keep that balance in our liturgy? Just this week each conference participant received the gift of 3 hymnbooks: *New Wine in Old Wineskins*, volumes 1 and 2, edited by James Abbington who was one of the keynoters. The third hymnbook was *Sing of the World Made New: Hymns of Justice, Peace and Christian Responsibility*, compiled and edited by Jeffery Rowthorn and Russell Schulz-Widmar. You can imagine my delight when I arrived home to find those hymnbooks at my door! One of the hymns in Rowthorn's book is called "Summoned by the God Who Made Us" and one of its verses includes the following words:

"Trust the goodness of creation; trust the Spirit strong within,  
Dare to dream the vision promised sprung from seed of what has been.  
Let us bring the gifts that differ, and in splendid, varied ways,  
sing a new church into being, one in faith, one in hope, one in love and joy

and praise.”<sup>1</sup>

Wouldn't it be something if we could sing a new church into being, daring to dream the vision promised sprung from a seed?

At our conference opening liturgy Maggie Dawn, who is the chaplain at YDS's Marquand Chapel, had a map of the world spread on the altar that was in the center of our worship space. We were each given a little packet of Himalayan salt and a packet of myrrh. The Himalayan salt represented our presence and myrrh represented healing. During the prayers of the people we were invited to come to the map and place myrrh on those parts of the world where we believed healing is needed and Himalayan salt on those parts of the world where we believed our presence is needed. At the ending liturgy we were given a little packet of seed. Maggie Dawn explained from the lectern that when a farmer sows seed, the farmer often just hurls in, and she hurled the seed from the lectern onto the altar that again had this world map. The seed represented proclamation or new growth. We were then invited during the prayers of the people to return to the map to place seed where we believed the Word might be proclaimed or where growth was needed. At that final liturgy we were each given a little glass vial of Himalayan salt, myrrh, and seed to recall our prayers for our broken world.

It was a powerful way of praying in liturgy—so powerful that I incorporated it at our *Heads Up! Hartford* Sunday liturgy later that month. *Heads Up! Hartford*

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<sup>1</sup> Delores Dufner, OSB, words © 1993 (published by OCP).

is a teen mission camp that brings together high school campers from urban and suburban Hartford churches and schools to learn about leadership, diversity, and community service. The experiential nature of offering prayers with the heart and body leaves an impact. Symbols have a way of helping us remember an experience. Seeds were planted among these teens, and they planted seeds themselves!

Wouldn't it be something if we could sing a new church into being, daring to dream the vision promised sprung from a seed?

Today we gather at this Jazz Mass that invites us to sing a new church into being with phenomenal music. Many of us are guests of this Cathedral today. We're guests at Hartford's Jazz Festival and warmly welcomed by this Cathedral congregation into their midst. We're also guests who come from churches in the North Central Region of the Episcopal Church in CT. It's a geography that spans the greater Hartford area from the Connecticut River west to the Farmington River, from Enfield south to Middletown and Meriden. The North Central Region churches gather for this awesome Jazz Mass to worship together and to give thanks for our new missionary Erin Flinn who will be formally welcomed and installed in this service to work with us as we sing a new church into being, daring to dream the vision promised sprung from a seed. It's an exciting day for us, and we're grateful to our Cathedral Dean and this congregation for welcoming us today.

Jesus teaches about a sower with a parable. “A sower went out to sow.”

Picture Jesus sitting beside the Sea of Galilee telling this story to his early followers. They would have understood the trials of a farmer that Jesus describes. In Jesus’ time farmers would sow seed and then plow. They would hurl it similar to the way Maggie Dawn hurled seed onto the world map. Some of the seed would land on good soil, some on rocky ground, some among thorns. It was kind of a fact of life for those early farmers that some seed would take root and some would not, and *they kept on sowing*. In contrast a farmer today will be very precise about sowing seeds carefully in rows of fertile soil.

I wonder why the sower in Jesus’ story hurled the seed anywhere and everywhere. Could it be that God’s mercy is wider and deeper than our minds can fathom? Even in those places where we least expect results, God works miracles and mends fences and breaks down walls and heals and surprises. In a sense I believe this parable is a reminder for us to “trust the goodness of creation; trust the Spirit strong within, to dare to dream the vision promised sprung from seed of what has been” as the words of that hymn proclaim.

The abundance of God is beyond our understanding, and yet we gain a little more understanding as we witness and experience new growth along our way. Listening opens the door to understanding. Jesus said, “But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed

bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.” (Matt 13:23).

We give thanks on this day for seed, seed that is hurled and seed carefully sown. We give thanks for the Sower who keeps on sowing and daring us to dream. We give thanks for the abundance we have and the abundance yet to be.

Let us pray.

“Trust the goodness of creation; trust the Spirit strong within,  
Dare to dream the vision promised sprung from seed of what has been.  
Let us bring the gifts that differ, and in splendid, varied ways,  
sing a new church into being, one in faith, one in hope, one in love and joy  
and praise.”

Amen.