

FORWARD

Prayer for guidance and power to persevere is vital as we feel led to launch a campaign for finances to expand and enhance the ministry of Virlina District and Camp Bethel into the future.

Each Congregation is asked to prayerfully consider their response to the Holy Spirit's leading as we seek together to share the Good News of Jesus. These worship resources and Bible study suggestions, written by pastors and other church leaders in our district, are being provided to each congregation to be implemented in order to be helpful to use as we respond to God's voice and leading.

"SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation" covers five areas of ministry, all of which are emphasized in the following resources. Much appreciation is expressed to the following persons for sharing their gifts and helping us to scatter the seed, reaching into the future generations. As we use these materials, we show our appreciation by acknowledging the authors.

1. Children, Youth and Young Adults:

Carol Elmore, Minister of Nurture and Music, Oak Grove (Roanoke)

2. Leadership Development:

Daniel Rudy, Pastor, Ninth Street

Tim Harvey, Pastor, Oak Grove (Roanoke)

3. New Church Development

Doug Veal, Pastor, Daleville

Dava Hensley, Pastor, First (Roanoke)

4. Outdoor Ministries (Camp Bethel):

Patrick Starkey, Pastor, Cloverdale

Sharon Flora, Licensed Minister, Oak Grove (Roanoke)

5. Smaller Membership Congregations:

Tara Shepherd, Licensed Minister, Mount Union

Stewardship Worship Resource: Ed Woodard, Retired Pastor

Children's Story: Mary St. John, Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Litany of Praise and Thanksgiving: Susan Gibson, Licensed Minister, Oak Grove (Roanoke)

Mission Resourcing Committee Members,
Herschel and Shirley Fike



Seed, Scattered & Sown
Reaching Beyond This Generation

Worship and Bible Study Resources

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“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Children’s Story

AUTHOR: Mary St. John

You may use/need: One Fresh Strawberry; One Sunflower Seed; One Dried Pea; One Dried Lima; One Pinecone; One Pineapple; One Coconut; A Quarter; A Dollar Bill. Optional: baggies of popped popcorn for each child; or an apple for each child; or a seed packet for each child. Greet the children as they approach.

Say: Today we are going to talk about seeds. Show me with your fingers, how big you think a seed is. **(Children will show varying sizes with their fingers and hands.)**

Say: Some of you are showing tiny seeds – like the ones on the outside of this strawberry. **(Hold up the strawberry for all to see.)** Some of you are showing medium size seeds, like this pea, or sunflower, or lima. **(Hold up these seeds for all to see.)** Did any of you think a seed could be THIS big? **(Show a pinecone, pineapple, or coconut.)** Seeds can be very different in size, and can produce very different types of plants. In the Bible’s New Testament, we find a story in the book of Matthew about planting seeds.

We learn that where you plant a seed is very important. If you plant it where birds can eat it, will it grow? **(Children should say “no”).** If you plant a seed on a hard rock with no dirt, will it grow? **(Children should say “no”).** What about if you let the hot sun scorch the seed, or plant it among weeds and thorns, will it grow? **(Children should say “no”).** But, the Bible tells us to plant our seeds where the soil is good, where the seed can grow, and then we will have a great crop or garden! In our church, and in our district, our “seeds” to make things grow look like this. **(Hold up a quarter or dollar bill).** When we give our offering to God, the offering helps us to grow God’s garden. God’s garden is where we have children’s programs, or activities for the youth and young adults. God’s garden is where we find new pastors and leaders for our churches, or where we find new and small churches that are growing in God’s love. And we also know that God’s garden includes Camp Bethel, with all of its workers and buildings to take care of.

So, now we know that all seeds look different. And, we know that even our offering can be a seed that helps God’s kingdom grow. Please bow your heads and pray with me!
“Dear God, thank you for the sun and the rain and the seeds of life that make things grow. May we use these offerings to do your will. Amen.”

You may send the children back to their pews or to children’s church with baggies of popped popcorn – seeds we eat! Or send them back with an apple each – have them find the seeds inside! Or, give them a packet of seeds to plant when they get home.

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

RESOURCE: Litany of Praise and Thanksgiving

AUTHOR: Susan Gibson

Based on Matthew 13: 3-9, 18-23

HYMN “Seed, scattered and sown” verse #1

UNISON: With assurance, we seek you Lord, as we prepare to lift up our voices. Thanking you for your bountiful gifts of grace and mercy, we gather together, united, as sisters and brothers in Christ to praise your name. May you bestow upon us your blessing as we prepare to open our eyes, ears and hearts in thanksgiving.

HYMN “Seed, scattered and sown” verse #2

UNISON: With compassion, we seek you Lord, to go forward in sowing the seeds of hope amongst those who still need to hear your word. As our seeds are scattered and sown, let us ask for God’s blessing, so that our seeds can be nourished and protected by his love and grace. Let us be reminded of hope, which is carried in our hearts, so that we can bring forth the fruits of our labor.

HYMN “Seed, scattered and sown” verse #3

UNISON: With faithfulness and commitment, we seek you Lord. As our spirits are awakened with your abiding and everlasting love, we pray you will renew our bodies and grant us thankful hearts. Teach us, oh Loving One, to hold the seeds of love, compassion, patience and kindness so that we may blossom and grow into individuals who will care for all people. It is through the nurturing of your grace and mercy that we can penetrate the depths and richness of your fertile soil, thus allowing growth and the transformation of our hearts.

HYMN “Seed, scattered and sown” Repeat refrain

References: “Seed, scattered and sown” (Dan Feiten, Hymnal: A Worship Book, 1992, #454)

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Children, Youth & Young Adults

AUTHOR: Carol Elmore

Ideas in preparation of worship:

- If there is a child, teen or young adult in your congregation who is a budding (or accomplished) artist, ask him/her to design the bulletin cover (or art of faith inside bulletin, if you are using the *Seed, Scattered & Sown* logo on the front).
- That same artist might paint the logo DURING worship...either during a hymn, or scripture reading, on a canvas sitting on an easel, placed where all can watch it being created. You COULD have the artist in your group draw the outline of the logo, and have each worship leader paint in a section when s/he isn't doing something else in the worship. Adapt this to your congregation's acceptance level of people moving around during worship (distractibility, etc.).
- Ahead of time, have an intergenerational group make a banner for the day, using the *Seed, Scattered & Sown* logo as inspiration.
- Ask a young couple to create a worship center on the altar, using the *Seed, Scattered & Sown* theme. (3 stages of a plant, or framed pictures of a child, a young adult, and an elderly person in the congregation, etc.)
- Ask a child who is taking beginning piano lessons to play the prelude. (This reminds us that ALL are needed and welcome in the Kingdom of God. God doesn't ask for us to be perfect; God asks for us to be willing.)
- Ask a middle or high schooler who is learning to play flute or violin (or other solo instrument) to play the melody by her/himself (so s/he can set the pace) of a hymn you will use in the service, to introduce a hymn. Then, the organ or piano can come in to accompany the congregation. The flutist can continue to play the melody during the hymn, if s/he feels comfortable.
- For the litanies, use a young adult and older person as co-leaders.
- Ask a young adult or teen to write a prayer for the worship. Then, let that person lead that prayer in worship.
- Use 4 ushers from 4 different age groups.
- If you have a 3 or 4 generation family in your congregation, have them read the scripture.
- Ask your young adults to lead a “talk back session” following worship with the congregation on the sermon (maybe over a simple meal). Then, discuss ways to incorporate all ages into the life of your congregation, the Virlina district, and our denomination.

***Calling In Hymn**

“Here in this place”
(1992 *Hymnal: a Worship Book*)

#6

***Call to Worship**

One: We have come to worship our God!

Children: We come with energy and excitement, as we worship our God!

Teens: We come with a fresh look, as we worship our God!

Young Adults: We come with new visions, as we worship our God!

Older Adults: We come with dreams, as we worship our God!

All: We all come to bring our gifts to worship the one God who made us all! 'Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our hymn of grateful praise.'

***Hymn** *"For the beauty of the earth"* (vs. 1, 3, 4, 5) #89
(1992 Hymnal: A Worship Book, blue)

Invocation

God, we are Your people. Each of us is created in Your image, yet we are various ages, sizes, and colors. We have a variety of gifts, and have different senses of humor. We have large families, and small. We are in various seasons of life, and whether a bulb or a mature plant, we are needed and useful. Lord, we celebrate who we are as individuals, and who we are together, as the body of Christ. May You receive glory and honor as we worship You this day. Amen.

Scripture Reading (read in two different versions, at different times in the service)

Matthew 13:3-8 (NRSV)

³ And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. ⁴ And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. ⁵ Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. ⁶ But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. ⁷ Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. ⁸ Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Matthew 13:3-8, The Message

³⁻⁸ "What do you make of this? A farmer planted seed. As he scattered the seed, some of it fell on the road, and birds ate it. Some fell in the gravel; it sprouted quickly but didn't put down roots, so when the sun came up it withered just as quickly. Some fell in the weeds; as it came up, it was strangled by the weeds. Some fell on good earth, and produced a harvest beyond his wildest dreams.

Offertory Thought

Most seeds will die if they are not put into the soft ground, watered and nurtured. Likewise, our church will struggle, and may die without intentional nurturing. Our resources are part of that nurturing. It takes the gifts and resources of all of us to be a healthy, thriving Church. As we pause to give of our financial resources, dream about what else you can do or give to further the Kingdom of God!

Hymn Suggestions:

Hymnal: A Worship Book, blue

"Here in this place"	#6
"For the beauty of the earth"	#89
"All things bright and beautiful"	#156
"Joyful, joyful we adore thee"	#71
"Seed, scattered and sown"	#454
"God of the earth, the Sky, the Sea"	#53

“O God, who gives us life”	#483
“God of our life”	#486
“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”	#46
“Bless’d be the tie that binds”	#421
“Come, thou fount of every blessing”	#521
(Share that words were written by a 23 year old man.)	
“In the bulb there is a flower”	#614
“Jesus, friend so kind and gentle”	#621
“Wonder of wonders”	#622

The Brethren Hymnal, red

“For the beauty of the earth”	#92
“All things bright and beautiful”	#93
“Joyful, joyful we adore thee”	#27
”God of the Earth, the Sky, the Sea”	#94
“I Sing the Mighty Power of God”	#95
“With Happy Voices Singing”	#11
“Blest Be the Tie That Binds”	#505
“Come, thou fount of every blessing”	#438

(Share that words were written by a 23 year old man.)

CoB Hymnal Supplement

“Bring many names”	#1088
“I was there to hear your borning cry”	#1078
“The love of our Savior”	#1113

If you have a license to print:

“We Are One Body,” by Dana Scallon

Children’s Story

What are seeds good for? If I wanted to eat a banana, could I just chew on these seeds? No, I need to plant these seeds, and it will take some time to grow a banana tree, right? It will take someone to take care of the planted seeds, to water and fertilize them; God will send sun shine to help the seeds grow into a tree so it can produce bananas.

Just as banana trees do not begin as full-grown, mature trees, neither do people. In fact, people start out quite small. Right? Look around...people start out as what? Babies! Then, if you feed and water them...well, and hold them, love on them, take good care of them, etc., they grow to be teen agers, then to be adults.

In the Bible, in the book of Psalms, David said to God, “*You knit me together in my mother’s womb.*” God has taken care of us even before we were born. God loves us that much! It takes a lot of people to love on us and take care of us to help us grow up to be adults. It takes our parents to feed and love us, but it also takes our church family to love on us, to teach us, to encourage us, and to show us God’s love for us.

(Share a couple of halved bananas with the children.)

Song:

Oh, who can make a seed grow? I’m sure I can’t, can you?
 Oh, who can make a seed grow? No one but God, ‘tis true.

Oh, who can make it rain? I'm sure I can't, can you?
Oh, who can make it rain? No one but God, 'tis true.

Oh, who can make the sun shine? I'm sure I can't, can you?
Oh, who can make the sun shine? No one but God, 'tis true.

Oh, who can make a banana? I'm sure I can't, can you?
Oh, who can make a banana? No one but God, 'tis true.

Sending

May the God of the acorn, *and* of the strong Oak tree go with you this day. Know that you are an important piece in the body of Christ. Take God's love, given for all, and scatter it freely. It might just "produce a harvest beyond your wildest dreams!" Go and love!

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Leadership Development

AUTHOR: Daniel Rudy

Call to Worship

One: As Jesus walked along the lakeshore, he saw Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting their nets and he called to them saying, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people.”

All: Jesus is still calling to us, women and men, young and old, persons of all races and ethnicities, “Come and follow me.”

One: While all are called into ministry as disciples of Christ, some are set apart, called to be apostles, prophets, evangelists or teachers, in order that the saints might be equipped for the work of ministry.

All: We give thanks for those who have heard the call to set apart ministry, and we pray that you would give us ears to hear your call.

One: As we worship this day, open us to your call, Mighty God, that we might hear your voice and respond in faith.

All: We come seeking your ways, O Lord. Help us to respond faithfully to your call in our lives.

Gathering Prayer

Lord Jesus, as you prepared to ascend into heaven, you promise the disciples that they would receive power to witness to you in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth. Just as you equipped the disciples for the tasks that you called them too, we pray that as we worship you would equip us, Mighty God, with the power of your Spirit, so that we can faithfully follow you sharing your love with all that we come into contact with. We thank you for those who first shared your love with us, and pray that the love of Christ would empower us to answer your call. Speak to us as we worship. Amen.

Offertory Thought

We have received from the Lord through the faithful ministry of our Sisters and Brothers in the church. As we prepare to give of our financial resources, let us pause to consider how God may be calling us to share his love, his mercy and his faithfulness with others in this congregation, this district and beyond.

Offertory Prayer

Holy God, you call us to serve you with the whole of our lives, proclaiming that all that we have, our work and our worship, our time and our talents, our love and our money belong to you, for service to your reign. Receive these offerings as a sign of our devotion to Christ and the Church. For it is in his name that we pray. Amen.

Suggested Hymns

Hymnal: A Worship Book

“Praise, I Will Praise You Lord”	#76
“He Leadeth Me”	#599
“Gracious Spirit, Dwell with Me”	#507

“Take My Life”	#389
“Be Thou My Vision”	#545
“I Love to Tell the Story”	#398
“We Walk by Faith”	#570
“Lord, You Sometimes Speak”	#594
“Guide My Feet”	#546
“Here I Am, Lord”	#395
“Obey My Voice”	#163
“For Christ and the Church”	#416

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: New Church Development

AUTHOR: Doug Veal

Suggested Scripture Passages:

Old Testament: Ezekiel 33:30-33

Psalm: Psalm 65:9-13

Gospel: Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23 (suggested sermon text)

Epistle: Acts 1:1-11

Call to worship (based on Psalm 96)

Leader: O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.

People: Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Leader: As we come to sow seeds for the future,

People: We declare God's glory and steadfast love to all the ends of the earth.

Leader: For great is the Lord,

People: And greatly to be praised.

Leader: Come, let us worship our God.

All: Come, let us worship and praise the Lord our God!

Invocation

O God of planting and of harvest, we gather this day to worship you. May we feel your Holy Spirit among us, empowering us to plant seeds for your kingdom everywhere we go. Grant that this time will encourage us to follow the call of your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Responsive Litany (based on Psalm 126)

Leader: O God, we dream of planting seeds of faith for the next generation.

People: When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.

Leader: We sometimes wonder, O God, when you will bring about a restoration for our church and our world. When will it be said among the nations:

People: “The Lord has done great things for them.” And among us, we proclaim that the Lord has done great things for us.

Leader: O God, we rejoice in all that you do for us.

People: Praise the Lord, O our souls.

Leader: Still, when we begin to plant the seeds for the future,

People: We weep with despair, for we do not see how you will continue the church.

Leader: We place our trust in you,

People: Knowing that you will never let our seeds go to waste.

Leader: May we plant the seeds of the future in faith,

People: Knowing that you will, someday, bring home the harvest, and we can rejoice with shouts of joy.

Leader: Let us sing songs of praise and thanksgiving,

All: For the steadfast love of the Lord will surely bring God's presence to future generations!

Invitation to Offering

One way that we plant seeds for the future is through our financial gifts. These seeds are used in many different ways. Those financial gifts that go towards new church development allow us to plant seeds in new communities and in new groups of people. May we give generously as we support the development of new congregations within our district.

Offertory Prayer

Planting God, take these seeds we give to you this day to continue to grow your kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven. Use them to plant the seeds of your kingdom through the development of new churches and through the revival of those congregations that have been a part of your work for many years. In the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ, Amen.

Pastoral Prayer

O God of all creation, as we move through this time of worship we take time to offer up to you our communal prayers. We are thankful, O God, for the work of our forbearers in the faith, who so generously offered up their faithful planting of seeds for future generations. You, O Lord, have allowed their seeds to bear fruit in us, indeed even thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold, just as your Son Jesus promised. O God, we know that you are the reason that such faith has blossomed within us. We will forever rejoice and be thankful for the faith that we have received from those who came before us and, ultimately, from you, our creator, redeemer, and sustainer.

Forgiving God, we confess that too often we do not want to be engaged in the hard work of planting the seeds of your kingdom. We worry about the changes that we have seen in our church over the years, and wonder whether there is any point in planting for the future when it seems the future may never come. We would rather focus on our own comfort and existence than on dreaming and working towards a new vision of your kingdom here among us that looks so different than what has come before. Forgive us, O God. Remind us that your steadfast love endures forever. Encourage us to know that while the church may indeed look different in the years to come, you, O God, will continue to bring about the kingdom of God that was inaugurated through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son, Jesus.

Empowering God, send your Holy Spirit among us this day as we seek to commit to the future of your kingdom, of your church, as we pledge our lives and our fortunes to continue the work of your son. May we seek to support the new church plants and other seeds that are being planted here in the Virgina District that will lay the basis for the coming generations of your children. We pray this in the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ, who was and who is and who will come again. Amen.

Benediction

Go, carrying the seeds of faith into the world. Go, knowing that God has entrusted us with the resources of the Kingdom here on earth. Go forth and plant the seeds that have been given to us. Amen.

Children's Story (based on Matthew 13:1-8, 18-23)

Before the service, gather the following items: a number of seeds; pictures of a path, rocky ground, a weedy garden, and a good patch of soil for planting; and a well-established plant

in a pot (preferably, the plant would match up with the seeds you are showing, but this is not required).

Invite the children forward, and show them the seeds. Ask them what you can do with seeds (plant them, eat them, etc.) Explain that Jesus told a story about a farmer who was planting some seeds in different places. Show them the picture of a path, and ask how a seed might fare being planted there. Then show them a picture of the rocky ground and weedy garden, and ask the same question. Next, show them a picture of good garden soil, and ask how they think this would work for planting. Finally, pull out your potted plant, and tell them that good soil can grow a plant that will produce many more seeds than were needed to start that one plant. Explain that God asks us to plant seeds as well, seeds that are the teachings of Jesus. Tell the children that while not all of these seeds bear fruit, some will be planted in people who will make a big difference in God's kingdom in the future. We are simply to go about planting the seeds, telling people about Jesus, and let God work from there. Tell the children that one way we can plant seeds is to give money to our church, (and district) which uses that money to work in the community to share the message of Jesus. Explain that planting new churches is one way that our local church and the district work to plant seeds in the world.

Close in prayer.

Suggested Hymns:

Hymnal: A Worship Book, blue

"What is this place"	#1
"Here in this place"	#6
"We plow the fields and scatter"	#96
"You are salt for the earth"	#226
"The church's one foundation"	#311
"Beyond a dying sun"	#323
"Great is thy faithfulness"	#327
"Renew your church"	#363
"God of grace and God of glory"	#366
"Lord, whose love in humble service"	#369
"God, whose giving"	#383
"We give thee but thine own"	#384
"Take my life"	#389
"I love to tell the story"	#398
"For Christ and the church"	#416
"Count well the cost"	#437
"Seed, scattered and sown"	#454

CoB Hymnal Supplement:

"Go forth for God"	#1058
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The Brethren Hymnal, red

"God of grace and God of glory"	#321
"Take my life"	#349
"Great is thy faithfulness"	#429
"Christian, let your burning light"	#435
"I love to tell the story"	#440

"The church's one foundation"	#491
"For Christ and the church"	#494
"Lord of the living harvest"	#558
"We've a story to tell to the nations"	#564
"We plow the fields and scatter"	#592
"We give thee but thine own	#676

Suggested worship resources from Brethren publications:

Hymnal: A Worship Book (blue): 662, 670, 672, 677, 691, 696, 703, 710, 718, 733, 793

CoB Hymnal Supplement: 1089, 1106, 1115, 1123

For All Who Minister: 80C, 87G, 95A, 98E, 103E, 109B, 115B, 120B, 121C, 124H

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Outdoor Ministries

AUTHOR: Patrick Starkey

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP (A)

Leader/Group 1: Take a marshmallow, roasted over the campfire, and place it on a milk chocolate square.

Leader/Group 2: Then place one graham cracker under the chocolate and another over the marshmallow, squeeze and eat.

Both/All: You'll want s'more!

Leader/Group 1: Listen to a parable from Jesus- it's about the generosity of a seed-sower.

Leader/Group 2: Or is it about the readiness of different soils to receive the seeds?

Both/All: You'll want to listen s'more!

Leader/Group 1: Recall God's grace to you. Be receptive to God's grace today. Recognize God's grace to all.

Leader/Group 2: Take time to pray. Take part in this new chance for gospel seeds to spread beyond our generation.

Leader/Group 1: Give yourself to something big.

Leader/Group 2: Give yourself to the call of Christ, who gave his all.

Both/All: You'll want to give s'more!

CALL TO WORSHIP (B) (From Hymnal: A Worship Book, #670)

Leader: Our God, we gather to worship you, the One who creates all things.

People: For the gift of creation, we give thanks.

Leader: We gather to worship you, the One who brings salvation through Jesus Christ.

People: For the gift of redemption, we give thanks.

Leader: We gather to worship you, the One who sustains us by the Spirit.

People: For the gift of your presence, we give thanks.

Leader: We bring to you our offerings of thanks and praise for all your gifts.

People: We worship you—our Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. AMEN.

INVOCATION (A)

We gather to worship you, O God. May we be good soil for the seed you sow. May the good news of your love in Jesus Christ find fertile ground. May we hear your word and revere your word and bear fruit which, in your hands, becomes a heaping harvest. AMEN.

INVOCATION (B)

God our Maker, thank you for meeting us in creation: beside a spring pond, below a mountain, between the forest trees. God our Savior, thank you for meeting us in Christ, the One who shows us and supplies us the love which goes all the way. God, our Sustainer, thank you for meeting us in the church, that community of sisters and brothers who, in the bond of your Spirit, become far more together than we are alone or apart. Receive our

worship and service to your glory, to our growth in faith and faithfulness, and to the good of our neighbors and generations to come. In Jesus' name. AMEN.

HYMN

"For the fruit of all creation"

#90

(alternative tune to use is from #433 "Go, my children": AR HYD Y NOS)

CHILDREN'S STORY

(Materials: Graham crackers, freshly microwaved marshmallow, milk chocolate square. You might choose also to have an assistant step up at the end of the story with s'mores prepared for each child.)

One fun thing I enjoy at camp is fixing s'mores. Here's a graham cracker. It's nice. But alone, it's one graham cracker. Here's a soft, warm marshmallow. It's nice. But alone, it's one marshmallow. Here's a chocolate square. It's nice. But alone, it's one chocolate square. (Assembling s'more) Put them all together, though, and we have so much more--- s'more!

We couldn't have s'mores at camp or church if some people hadn't done something really important long ago. They planted seeds. Someone planted a wheat seed, so wheat could grow and become wheat flour to make the graham cracker. No seed, no s'more. Someone planted a sugar cane seed, so sugar could grow and help make the marshmallow. No seed, no s'more. Someone planted a cacao bean seed, so a tree could grow beans that become cocoa butter to help make the chocolate square. No seed, no s'more.

I'm glad I learned about fixing s'mores at Camp Bethel. But you know, we wouldn't have Camp Bethel, a place to learn about fixing s'mores, if some people hadn't done something really special long ago. More importantly, there wouldn't be a Camp Bethel to go to and learn more about God's love and power and goodness if they hadn't done it.

Know what people did? It's kind of like they planted seeds. Each person shared maybe one thing, but each of those things grew and got put together by God to make so much more.

Someone shared the idea for a camp in the special spot where we now find it. Later, someone made a worship space on a special hilltop, Vesper Hill, where we can see more of God's great creation. Later, someone pitched in to help Camp Bethel spread further into the forest and make spaces for campers to enjoy homes in the woods. Really, many "someones" did this, each helping in a way that, when God put it all together, it became so much more.

In the Bible (Matthew 13), Jesus told a story about a sower, a farmer who scattered seeds everywhere, just knowing that something good would grow. I think one reason Jesus told this story is to show that God is like the sower, spreading goodness everywhere, giving everyone a chance to receive it. Also, Jesus means for his friends to be like the sower and spread his love all around. When I share Jesus' love and tell about him, and you share Jesus' love and tell about him, and we all help share Jesus' love and tell about him, God puts it all together and makes it into so much more!

Now, we (all of our churches) have a chance to pitch in and help Camp Bethel make new spaces for more people to come there and see and feel and share God's goodness. To help, I can pray. To help, I can give an offering of money. Still, I am one person. But, if you and I and all our churches pitch in and pray and give an offering, God will put it all together and make so much more!

Let's start praying right now! And after our prayer, we'll share s'mores!

OFFERING

Invitation (A)

The Parable of the Sower invites us to celebrate: “the broadcasting of God’s grace and mercy to all persons. Some seeds do not sprout, some wither and die, and some produce many times their numbers... Faithfulness demands that we persist in the work of sowing, whether the context is favorable or unfavorable... We are compelled to scatter and sow seeds of God’s grace for the spiritual transformation of ourselves and those around us, as well as our society and world.”

(from the “Seed, Scattered and Sown: Reaching Beyond this Generation” theme statement)

Invitation (B)

“What gift can we bring”
(presented by Choral Group/ Ensemble/ Band)

#385

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

Generous God, our offerings and efforts are a prayer that you, the Great Sower, will use us as your divine instruments. With thanksgiving for all the ways you already have touched and transformed many lives through our shared ministries, and with eager anticipation for the new ways you will touch and transform many more lives, we ask your Spirit’s help that we would continue the work of Jesus reaching beyond our own generation. In Christ’s name. AMEN.

(adapted from the theme statement)

CALL TO PRAYER

“Seed, scattered and sown” (verses 2-3)

#454

PASTORAL PRAYER

SCRIPTURE

Matthew 13: 1-9 (with possible addition of verses 18-23)

SERMON

Sermon Suggestions:

(1) A sermon on this passage might elaborate on themes introduced in the children’s story, beginning with God as the sower of seeds, of widespread grace. Notice that in the story, there is no indication that the sower spared any seed. In tossing seed all around, to every spot, none is left in the bag. Jesus himself held nothing back, but poured himself out completely for his people. His people, in turn, are to be generous in spreading gospel seeds. These efforts won’t always get a ready reception or yield hoped-for results. That didn’t stop Jesus. It is Christ the Lord who shows and supplies his followers the strength to keep sowing seeds, confident that the harvest is in God’s hands. The good news of God’s love will find fertile ground beyond our imagining, beyond the particulars of our planning, even beyond our seeing. We scatter seed for someone else, for some future growth.

- (2) Especially with the addition of verses 18-23, which emphasize less the Sower and more the Soils, a sermon might explore obstacles to gospel growth. There is the heavily trafficked path, where any seed placed is likely to get eaten up by busy schedules, alternate activities, unconcern and unavailability for relationship-building with God and others. There is the rocky ground, where a surface-skimming belief says “preach to me of ease.” When the first hint of heat comes, worship wilts, service shrivels, and faith fades. There is the thorny ground, where, in the grip of weeds, in the grip of the world, self, wealth and stuff, little regard remains for the other person, for the left-out, for the priorities of God. Maybe we have been this soil. Maybe we know others who have. The good news is the Sower keeps sowing. If that ground has not yet turned good, the Sower still is.
- (3) The sermon might specifically name ways this campaign seeks to make the good ground of Camp Bethel even more hospitable for gospel seeds to grow. Road improvements and an RV Village will open wider access to sharing this sacred space. With the challenge goal met, new Unity Village cottages and support facilities will make it possible to enlarge further the abundant summer camp harvest of recent years. Also with the challenge goal come improvements to the Ark Dining Hall and discreet development of trails further in the woods, to further the nourishment and exercise of our bodies and our relationships with our Creator, the creation, and each other.
- (4) Noting the setting described in Matthew 13:1-2, a sermon preached at Camp Bethel might be delivered from a boat, pushed out just beyond one of the ponds’ shorelines. When preached in the sanctuary of a congregation, the message might include mention of Jesus moving from the synagogue to open spaces. Similarly, the message could exhort us to take our proclamation and practice of Jesus’ way beyond the walls of our buildings. In these two verses there is one more reason to support the ministries of Camp Bethel.

Sermon Illustrations:

Many of the early faith lessons I learned at Camp Bethel came when a leader brought attention to some feature in nature that told us something about God or amplified a Bible story. With our Matthew 13 parable and this mission resourcing campaign’s reference to sowing, in faith, seeds whose growth we may not see in our own generation, consider one or more of the following:

- (1) The water strider is the fascinating insect which skims the surface of the pond. It sometimes gets called “the Jesus bug” for walking on the water. It is a fairly common occurrence to sit by the Camp Bethel spring at morning watch and see a previously stationary water strider do a single swim stroke with its legs, causing an ever-expanding circular ripple to cross the whole pond and, in time, reach the surrounding shore. The bug doesn’t see that result of its move. Nor may we see the far reaches of the individual moves we now make to share our faith and resource this mission. But ripple out they will.
- (2) Summer after summer, a counselor or camp chaplain would tell us young campers how, though we could not see them, the Big Oak’s roots extended just as far as its long branches. So, not only does one of our all-time favorite camp trees

offer a lesson in how a seed/acorn found good ground and grew deep roots that contribute to lasting strength. It also reinforces the prior point that there is growth we do not see, but it is real and, with God, guaranteed.

- (3) What a sight! On a clear night, one sees the sky above Camp Bethel's Right Field campfire circle filled with stars scattered high and wide. They are scattered like the Sower's seeds: generously. They are an inspiration and an additional invitation to our generosity.
- (4) Speaking of the campfire circle, it has been sung by more than one generation of Camp Bethel campers and potential campaign supporters: "It only takes a spark to get a fire going, and soon all those around can warm up in its glowing. That's how it is with God's love once you've experienced it. You spread His love to everyone—you want to pass it on." (see song reference/credit below) Again, we are sowing seeds for the benefit of those yet to come. With God's love, it is just the most natural thing, right? Play a part. Pass it on.

SENDING HYMN/SONG	"You are salt for the earth"	#226
Or "You shall go out with joy"	#427	
Or "For Christ and the church"	#416	
Or "Pass it on" by Kurt Kaiser		

© 1969 Bud John Songs (Admin. EMI Christian Music Publishing)

BENEDICTION

Go now, showered in God's grace. Go now, your faith pouch overflowing with seeds of God's love to scatter everywhere. Go now, knowing that the One whose hands hold the harvest goes with us all. Amen.

CHORAL BENEDICTION/ POSTLUDE "Go in Peace"

Writer(s): Liz Rose, Sam Baker; Copyright: Sony/ATV Tree Publishing, Cake Taker Music
(from Camp Bethel summer program, 2014-2015)

Unless otherwise noted, hymn selections from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Smaller Membership Congregations AUTHOR: Tara Shepherd

Welcome & Announcements

GATHER

Prelude [or Congregational Hymn], preparing our hearts and minds for worship
(Suggested instrumental prelude)

“We Gather Together”

***Responsive Call to Worship**

ONE: O sing to the LORD a new song; sing to the LORD, all the earth.

Sing to the LORD, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day.

Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples.

All: For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.

ONE: For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

Honor and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.

All: For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.

ONE: Worship the LORD in holy splendor; tremble before him, all the earth.

He will judge the peoples with equity. He will judge the world with
righteousness, and the peoples with his truth.

All: For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised.

ONE: Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; let the sea roar, and all that fills
it; let the field exult, and everything in it.

ALL: For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised! Amen.

Psalm 96, adapted

***Invocation**

O God, Author of eternal light, lead us in our worshipping this day; that our lips may
praise you, our lives may bless you, our meditations may glorify you; through Christ our
Lord. Amen.

For All Who Minister, p. 87

***Congregational Hymn**

(Suggested hymns)

“We Gather Together”

“Brethren, We Have Met to Worship”

“Praise, I Will Praise You Lord”

“Lord Reign in Me”

TOGETHER

Offertory Thought

“What shall I return to the Lord for all his bounty to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord; I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people.” – Psalm 116:12-14

Offering

*Doxology

Confession & Assurance of Pardon

ONE: John the Baptist called people to repentance to prepare them for the coming of God’s reign. Let us, too, repent, that we may be ready for God who comes to us.

All: O God, we confess our lack of trust in you.

We confess we place our wills before yours.

We confess our failure to love as you have commanded.

We acknowledge our sins before your holy and perfect name.

Forgive your people, O God. Forgive your church.

Lead us into your path of righteousness.

And restore us to the ways of Jesus.

ONE: God says “Remember these things, O Israel, for you are my servant; you will not be forgotten by me. I have swept away your transgression like a cloud, and your sins like mist. Return to me, for I have redeemed you.” And God’s son says: “Take heart, your sins are forgiven.”

For All Who Minister, p. 106-108, adapted

Sharing Joys & Concerns

Morning Prayer

“Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” – Ephesians 3:20-21

Choir Anthem or Special Music

(Suggested anthem/hymn)

“Lord, Listen to You Children Praying”

“Great Is Thy Faithfulness”

“How Great is Our God”

HEARING GOD’S WORD

Scripture Reading

Philippians 4:4-9

Special Music or Congregational Hymn
(Suggested hymns)

“At the Name of Jesus”
“Now Thank We All Our God”
“He Leadeth Me”

Sermon

SENDING

*Hymn
(Suggested hymns)

“Alleluia”
“Open My Eyes That I May See”

*Benediction

Almighty, Holy Spirit of truth and purity,
our living Comforter,
enlighten us, direct us, and sanctify us.
Strengthen the faith in our souls and hearts, and grant us a sincere trust.
Sustain and guide us that we may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our
lives,
that we may see the will of the Lord,
that we may forever be in God's holy temple,
and with a joyous heart give thanks unto God,
and in the assembly of God's eternal church honor and praise God forever. Amen.
(Philipp Melanchthon, 1550)

*Postlude

*Please stand in body or spirit

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

WORSHIP RESOURCE: Stewardship

AUTHOR: Ed Woodard

Call to Worship

Leader: The Great Steward has called us to be God's servants.

People: All that we are, all that we own, all that we hope to be is God's.

Leader: Let us worship this day in word and action.

People: And may we be true to the promises we make.

Responsive Prayer (in unison)

We confess to You, Faithful One, that we are a fearful people. We fear for tomorrow even though You have been faithful to walk with us through all our yesterdays. We confess that because we trust in ourselves, we are afraid that there will not be enough for our tomorrows. Teach us that You are our Loving Parent who owns everything above and beneath the stars. Teach us not to feel like paupers when we are challenged by You to sacrifice for Your work in the world. Help us find our joy, not in the trinkets of the world, but in faithfulness to Your Will. Amen.

Offertory Prayer

Leader: We come to You to give back a portion of what You have so generously given to us.

People: Keep our minds and hearts open to the needs of our church, our district, our world.

Leader: You have sacrificed everything for us. Teach us the meaning of giving that we might take on the image of Your sons and daughters.

All: Give us all generous hearts that find their joy in doing Your Will. Amen.

Suggested Hymns

Hymnal: A Worship Book

“God Whose Giving” #383

“We Give Thee But Thine Own” #384

“Take My Life and Let It Be” #389

Red Hymnal

“We Give Thee But Thine Own” #343

“For Christ and the Church” #494

“Take My Life and Let It Be” #349

Children's Story

Materials Needed: 20 foot rope, and masking tape

What do do: Tie a rope around your middle and challenge a child to pull you over a line (piece of tape). After the child fails to pull you over, suggest that it's OK for them to get help. After several children (and/or some adults) pull you over the line, discuss with the children the idea of comparing working individually and as a group on a task. We are able to accomplish much more working together for God through our church, our district and our denomination. Scripture to tie in: I Corinthians 12:14

Ideas For Those Who Preach and Teach:

From Matthew 13: 1-23 (The Story of Scattering “Seeds”)

- What are these “seeds”?
 - o Jesus is speaking of the secrets or mysteries of the kingdom of God.
- Who is to scatter them?
 - o Jesus, his disciples, and all who follow him.
- What will come up from these “seeds”?
 - o According to the parables in Mark 4:26-32, secretly, without our knowledge or understanding, a **great harvest** will arise that will be life-giving and sustain all of life.
- Will people understand this?
 - o Matt. 13:13-17 (with a focus on vs. 15) – Because God gives us freedom, there will be those who remain blind to what God is showing them and deaf to the message. Their hearts will grow cold and insensitive. Tragically, they will fail to find healing.
 - o Others will be blessed because they see, hear and obey what really counts. The great saints of the past longed to know what you now know. It is implied that those who receive this message and become part of the “scattering of seed” will have compassionate and sensitive hearts and that they as a people as well as individuals will find authentic healing.
- Why will people fail to spread these “seeds”?
 - o Matt.13:18-19 – People ignore or trivialize the message of God’s Kingdom. It doesn’t stick.
 - o Matt. 13:20-21 – People impulsively decide to commit to the way of Jesus, but at the first sign of hardship, their faith withers and they give up. They did not count the cost.
 - o Matt. 13:22 – People seriously decide to follow in the way of Jesus, but their faithfulness is choked out by all the other problems they have and their attraction to the accumulation of possessions and security.
- What will the results be if we are faithful to scatter these “seeds” in both word and deed?
 - o Matt. 13:23 – Those who really hear and understand what Jesus is calling them to do will bear fruit 30 times, 60 times, even 100 times more than what it has done for them already.
 - o What is offered in faith will explode in its results for God’s Kingdom. **We cannot comprehend how far it will reach, who it will reach, or what impact it will have. All we know is that it will be far beyond our imagination.**

Application

Our failure to give is often based on our fear of the future. Our faithfulness to give is often based on our hope that the Lord walks with us into a future we cannot see but know that God is promising to be there with us.

Without being able to see the future, the act of committing resources to a time that has not yet come to be, is truly an act of faith. It is to believe so strongly in God’s intention

to reconcile the world to Godself, that we sacrifice in the present moment so that others may be able to find the wholeness and healing that only the Spirit can bring. We eat food that others have grown. We find shade and rest under trees that others have planted. Many have an education that parents sacrificed and went without in order that their children might be blessed. Our district and local churches were preparing to bless you before you were born. Those believers before you loved Jesus enough to give up something of their present in order that the possibility of you and I being blessed in the future would become a reality. The act of giving is an act of hope and faith that the "seed" we offer Christ will become a force that explodes 30, 60, a 100 times over. We may get a partial glimpse of this future. Or we may see none of it at all. That was the way it was for the prophets, that is the way it was for all the saints of old. You and I are called to offer up what we have trusting that God will bless us and bless those who come after us.

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

BIBLE STUDY: Leadership Development

AUTHOR: Tim Harvey

***Called to Serve* Acts 9:1-19**

Introduction

The 2014 Annual Conference adopted a new ministerial leadership polity paper. In it, we affirm the need for local congregations to diligently call persons to the set-apart ministry, and for districts to train, mentor, and encourage those who sense God’s call to ministry. This Bible Study lesson invites us to take a look at how Saul and Ananias were called to the ministry, and how these roles are similar to the ways Brethren serve in set-apart ministry today.

The ministerial polity paper affirms the need for our congregations to have a strong “culture of call” with these words: “as our congregations and districts face times of great transition...there is a deep desire to instill a culture of call within the church and to develop intentional discernment processes as individuals explore a call to ministry within the context of the community of faith” (2014 *Ministerial Leadership*, p. 3).

Brethren have long affirmed that we are each called to take our place in the body of Christ by using the various gifts given to each person. Baptism is understood as an ordination into a common ministry for each person. Even though this particular lesson focuses on those called to the set-apart ministry of pastoral leadership, we must not see this form of ministry as more important than any other. We must also not view the set-apart ministers as a group of persons called to do ministry on behalf of the congregation, as if others are mere spectators or consumers of Christian ministry. We are each called to take our place in the body of Christ.

Questions to consider

1. In what ways do you serve your local congregation?
2. How does your congregation identify persons who should consider the set-apart ministry?
3. Who was the last person your congregation called to the set-apart ministry? What was that experience like for the congregation?

Knocked off your feet for the Lord (Acts 9:1-9)

Saul is a fairly unknown character in this part of Acts. He was previously introduced in Acts 7:58 - 8:3, where we learn that he was present at Stephen’s execution. We are told that many people “laid their coats” at Saul’s feet, as Saul “approved of their killing him.” In the severe persecution of the Jerusalem church that follows this, we see Saul leading the charge, “ravaging the church...dragging off both men and women” to prison. We have a glimpse of a young man who is already leader in his faith tradition and is quite committed to preserving the purity of his faith.

When the narrative of Acts returns to Saul in chapter 9, he is still on his rampage against Christianity. Having dealt with the church in Jerusalem, Saul obtains permission to

continue his pursuit of Christians to the city of Damascus, a journey which would take several days by horseback.

It is while Saul is on this journey that Jesus chooses to intervene. It is helpful to slow down as we read Acts 9:3-9 and try to imagine what this might have been like. Saul and his associates are traveling along when suddenly they are surrounded by a bright light. Saul is knocked to the ground (apparently he's the only one who is) and he hears Jesus speaking (as the others do as well): "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" booms the voice. Not recognizing the voice, he asks who is speaking, and learns that it is the risen Jesus himself. Saul is being given a task, but for now he is to continue to Damascus and await further instruction.

It is helpful to realize that not everyone experiences Jesus in this way. Saul's conversion story is one of the most dramatic in the New Testament. And while some people share dramatic conversion and call stories like this, most people's experience of these events happen over time, rather than all at once.

For the purposes of this lesson, however, the significant point is that the call to ministry is God's prerogative. By nearly any measure, Saul was the unlikeliest of persons to be brought into Christian ministry. He was an enemy of the church. And after he was converted, it took a significant amount of effort by Barnabas to convince the rest of the church that Saul was not simply a "wolf in sheep's clothing."

But Jesus saw something different in Saul. He saw beyond his current attitudes and activities into what Saul could become after conversion to faith. Where the church only saw someone to be afraid of (and rightly so), Jesus saw a person with great potential for a difficult missionary task.

A person does not need to be the greatest speaker or leader or teacher to become an effective minister. According to this story, one does not even need to be a Christian at the moment of the call. God will take care of equipping those whom God calls to serve.

Questions

1. As you consider the roles you play in the church, would you say you have been "called" to them? If so, how did you experience that call? Was it sudden, like Saul's? Did it happen over time? Share your experience with the class.
2. When considering persons your congregation might call to ministry, what characteristics might you look for? Are we at times too restrictive in considering whom to call to ministry? How might that be the case?
3. In what ways is your congregation willing to consider inviting some "unlikely" persons to try new areas of ministry? What prevents us from being bolder in this area?

An unwilling minister (Acts 9:10-19)

While Saul was sitting in Judas' home in Damascus, blind and reexamining his life, Jesus was preparing another person for ministry. Whereas Saul's call to ministry was broad and expansive, Ananias' was specific and focused. Jesus wanted Ananias to visit Saul to both pray with him and explain his ministry task.

Understandably, Ananias is reluctant to fulfill this task because Saul's reputation is widely known. Ananias fears his life will be at risk if he is anywhere near Saul, and in a former time, it would have been. But the situation has changed. Jesus tells Ananias that they are now allies in the expansion of the Gospel, and that he need not fear.

As we consider this story, we might consider why Ananias was needed at all. The reason is that Jesus has chosen to work through human beings. Saul's reputation as a persecutor of the church was so well known that he needed to establish his credibility among the people he had formerly persecuted. Ananias would not be the only one skeptical of Saul's story; the entire Christian population of Damascus would be! Jesus chose to work through human beings, and he needed someone to verify what had happened in Saul's life. This person would be Ananias.

Verse one of the hymn "Count Well the Cost" (# 437 in *Hymnal: A Worship Book*) invites us to consider the sacrifices we might make for our faith that seem very similar to what Ananias faced:

*"Count well the cost," Christ Jesus says, "when you lay the foundation."
Are you resolved, though all seem lost, to risk your reputation,
your self, your wealth, for Christ the Lord
as you now give your solemn word?*

As we consider our own ministry roles, as well as those we might call to ministry, how are we prepared to live our faith in a way similar to Ananias, or in the way described in this hymn verse?

Questions

1. How do you answer the question posed at the end of this section?
2. Have there been times in your congregation's history where ministry endeavors failed because people were unwilling to risk their own credibility to lend support to a new minister or ministry endeavor? Describe these times.
3. Who are the people in your congregation who are like Ananias?

Creating a culture of call

The Church of the Brethren ministerial leadership paper identifies set-apart ministry in two categories. One is the familiar "ordained minister." This is a person who is called to serve in a way somewhat similar to Saul—they are ordained for ministry to the wider church. They may serve one congregation for many years; they may serve shorter pastorates in many churches; they may become camp directors, denominational staff, or one of several other roles available for different places in the wider Church of the Brethren over many years.

A second, newer category is that of "commissioned minister." Somewhat like Ananias, this person is called from a local congregation to serve in that specific congregation. Their ministry credentials affirm them to the full range of ministry experience, but only with one particular congregation. This model of set-apart ministry is designed primarily with our smaller churches, and especially our western churches, in mind. It is a way for smaller congregations to benefit from the care and skill of a called, trained, pastor.

It is imperative that each of our congregations create a "culture of call," and diligently and prayerfully seek out those who might serve in set-apart ministry roles. An excellent example of a "culture of call" comes from the story of a small, west-Texas Episcopal church that was in existence from 1871-1971. This congregation rarely had an average attendance of greater than 25. Its last full time pastor moved away in 1939. From

1939 - 1971, the church was served 2 Sundays per month by students who drove 2 hours from a seminary. The other two Sundays, the members of this church attended the local Methodist church.

This doesn't sound like a very "successful" church by any standard we might consider. But then the speaker concluded the story. He told us that during the 100 year history of this west-Texas Episcopal church, 20 full-time church leaders were called. That's one every 5 years. Quite a culture of call, from an unlikely place.

Questions

1. What processes does your congregation have in place to call persons to the set-apart ministry?
2. When was the last time this was a topic of conversation for a sermon or a church council meeting?

“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

BIBLE STUDY: New Church Development

AUTHOR: Dava Hensley

Texts: Acts 1:8, Ezekiel 33: 30-33, Matthew 13: 3-8, 18-23

The Teacher:

For this study, the teacher will need to gather background information. First, use a bible dictionary, commentary, or other resource to learn about the Prophet Ezekiel, his ministry and personality, and to get an overview of the context upon which the Ezekiel scripture is written. Ezekiel’s writings are very specific to the time period of which it was written, but has relevance for our day. Second, read the first chapter of the book of Acts. Do background study in the book of Acts and Jesus call for us to go out into the world and share the good news of Jesus Christ. Third, read the Matthew scripture. Be sure as the teacher you understand the basic questions of: What is a parable? Why did Jesus teach in parables? Be familiar with the parable, “The Sower.”

“Be Gathered Into One”

Always begin study with prayer and for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Read words from hymn, “Seed, Scattered and Sown”, *Hymnal, A Worship Book*, 454 (see below)

Refrain:

Seed, scattered and sown, wheat, gathered and grown, bread, broken, and shared as one, the living Bread of God. Vine, fruit of the land, wine work of our hands, one cup that is shared by all, the living cup, the living Bread of God.

Verses:

1. Is not the bread we break, a sharing in our Lord? Is not the cup we bless, the blood of Christ outpoured?
2. The seed which falls on rock will wither and will die. The seed within good ground will flower and have life.
3. As wheat upon the hills was gathered and was grown, so may the church of God be gathered into one.

Opening Discussion Question: How many of you are gardeners? Describe some of your accomplishments as well as failures when it comes to your own attempts at gardening.

Read these words: Acts 1: 8, “Rather, you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

In the work of God’s Kingdom, we are all called to be witnesses in sharing the message of good news for Jesus Christ. We are the sowers of the seeds of grace and mercy, as we share the hope of the world through our belief in Jesus Christ. We are gardeners and witnesses for the sake of Christ. No matter what success or failures, we may have had with our own gardening adventures, in the spiritual realm, God brings the harvest and so there are no “bad gardening experiences.” (teacher may want to stop and talk about that last

statement.) (agree or disagree) We are to plant and water. God will bring forth the harvest. We may live to see the harvest or we may not, it is all about God's timing of the harvest. Yet, we are called to go, plant, and witness to the saving grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

We are witnesses for our day and must look forward for God's vision to find ways to witness and minister in the days ahead. Each believer is called to witness with special God given gifts. Each individual congregation is called to witness together in love and in service where God has established their community. And in the larger church, Virlina District with the New Church Development Committee, has and will continue to seek out new opportunities to witness including multicultural evangelism, new church starts, and planned efforts to minister to the college community in our district ministry. (Can you name some of the fellowships in our District?)

We have been commissioned by God to go and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ to all God's creation and the sharing of the Gospel is our witness to the One who lives in our hearts. This mission is an on- going call for our own lives as individual believers, within the local congregation and fellowship, and in the larger church which includes the Virlina District and carried out faithfully within the New Church Development Committee and the Church of the Brethren denomination.

“Being Faithful witnesses for Jesus Christ”

In the Church of the Brethren, we hopefully, do not find ourselves in the courtroom very often. We strive to work out our differences before we reach this alternative. But, we also know at times, we find ourselves on that “witness chair” sharing words of truth. I appreciate the words from Max Lucado, in his book, “Just Like Jesus.” He states, “We are witnesses. And like witnesses in a court, we are called to testify, to tell what we have seen or heard and to speak truthfully. Our task is not to whitewash nor bloat the truth. Our task is to tell the truth. Period. There is however, one difference between the witness in the court and the witness for Christ. The witness in court eventually steps down from the witness chair, the witness for Christ never does. Since the claims of Christ are always on trial, court is perpetually in session, and we remain under oath.”

It continues to be our on- going call and witness to plant the seeds of faith in the world. Where are we to plant? The Acts 1:8 scripture text tells us to share and plant in Jerusalem. This includes those persons closest to us. (the teacher may ask for examples) We are to share and plant in all of Judea. This includes those in surrounding areas, but not too far from our comfort zones. (the teacher may ask for examples) We are to share and plant in Samaria. This includes foreign territories that may know some of the good news, but continue to need to know the whole story of truth. (the teacher may ask for examples) We are to share and plant in every part of the world. This includes every human being we come in contact. (the teacher may ask for examples) Also, ask, “who have we left out in our planting and witnessing of the Gospel?). No one is to be left out as we witness and plant the message of hope through Jesus. The scriptures for our study continue to guide us in our endeavor of witnessing to all parts of the world and some of the obstacles we might face. Let us continue with our Old Testament Scripture:

Looking at the Text: Ezekiel 33: 30-33

The message of the book of Ezekiel revolves around the pivotal event in the book that is also the pivotal event in the history of Israel, the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Before the announcement of the fall, Ezekiel's message was characterized by judgment. Ezekiel exposed the moral depravity and absence of spiritual concern for the nation. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the nation was in exile, Ezekiel's message changed. His message became a message of hope. God would provide a new heart and a new spirit to enable the people to be faithful and thus avoid future judgment. Although many of Ezekiel's contemporaries conveyed that the message preached by Ezekiel was from the Lord, and they listened to his words, they did not put them into practice. Their motives included greed and unjust gains. Ezekiel shared a message of truth as God's messenger, yet the message never penetrated their hearts.

When God speaks through Ezekiel, he shares that the people are talking about what needed to be done. Conversations existed between these people some of which were neighbors and others were family members. God's Word was being proclaimed. They come to hear, to listen, but refuse to do what is told. They talked a good game about doing what God is asking them to do, but their own activities and busyness, keeps them from putting the Word into action. They listened, yet nothing happened in their own lives to put these words of truth into action. When the judgment finally comes, only then do they realize that the prophet had proclaimed God's Word and they had many opportunities to act on God's Word and be in obedience.

Questions:

1. Words of truth were spoken by Ezekiel to the people of Jerusalem. What kept the people from putting his words into action?
2. Is the Word of God being proclaimed today? Are we listening to our call to go and witness the Good News? What are some factors that hold us back from hearing God's word to evangelize and plant and water the seeds of faith?

Looking at the Text: Matthew 13: 3-8, 18-23

Chapter 13 of the book of Matthew begins the third discourse comprised of seven intertwined parables with an added eight for a total of fifteen. Jesus used parables as a major teaching method. A parable is an earthly story that has a heavenly meaning. Many of the parables addressed the Kingdom of God and what that Kingdom would be like, in the present and the Kingdom to come. The Kingdom will endure in the midst of opposition from the world. All the while, it continues to grow in power and influence as our mission continues and the Kingdom of God will ultimately prevail. Dudley Nichols, screenwriter is attributed this quote. "Jesus of Nazareth could have chosen simply to express Himself in moral precepts, but like a great poet He chose the form of parables, wonderful short stories that entertained and clothed the moral precept in an eternal form. It is not sufficient to catch man's mind, you must also catch the imaginative faculties of his mind."

Jesus sat by the Sea of Galilee in a boat. Jesus himself shared and interpreted this parable. Jesus shared that a farmer went out to scatter seed. As he scattered, some fell on the path and birds came and ate them. Other seed fell on rocky soil, and they sprouted immediately but the roots were not deep, so they dried up. Other seed fell among the thorny plants and the seed choked to death. Then, seed fell on the good soil and bore fruit.

One case it was 100 fold, another case it was sixty and another 30. Jesus explained that when the seed of the Word falls on the path, the Word quickly dies. The rocky ground allows the Word to be heard, but it has no roots, no depth. The seed spread among the thorny plants was an example of things getting tough and allowing the worries of the world to choke the life from the plant. Yet, when the Word is planted on good soil, those who hear and understand, this produces great fruit from one hundred, to sixty, to thirty times.

Questions:

1. We are called to plant and witness. Is every opportunity we have to share our faith going to be productive? Is it important that we see results in our planting and witnessing? What are ways that we can encourage each other when we don't see the results we think we should from our efforts? Is not sharing the Gospel ever an option for a believer of Jesus Christ?
2. Do you think that as the church we are doing all we can to share the Gospel? Yes or No? Explain why you feel this way? Share ways you feel positive or negative about how we are/are not sharing the Gospel?

And Now What: Applying God's Word to our Lives Today

Summary of the scripture texts: From the Acts verse, we hear and see Jesus commissioning believers to go and share the Word in all parts of the world. We examined from the Ezekiel text, the ability to hear the Word, yet choosing not to put the word into action. From the Matthew text, we see Jesus illustration through the parable, as Sowers of God's Word, there will be those who do not understand and will quickly dismiss the word proclaimed. There will be those who hear the word, but when tough times come, they will fall away from the faith. There will also be those who hear the Word, but the world will quickly choke its growth. But, there will be those who hear the Word and will bear good fruit in differing yields.

1. Do we believe that Jesus is still telling us we are to go into all the world and share the Word of the Gospel? How important is sharing the Gospel evident in your own life, your gathered community of the church, and in the district? Give examples. If the sharing of the Gospel is not evident in your life, the church, the district, or the denomination, why do you think this is true and what holds us back from witnessing?
2. Just as the people of Ezekiel's time were complacent in believing God's Word and then putting God's Word to action, are we in our times also complacent in putting God's Word of mission into action? Explain your answer.
3. Describe in your own words what Jesus is sharing with the disciples in the parable. How does it apply to mission and sharing of the Gospel in our day as individuals, in our congregations and fellowships, and in the larger church, the Virlina District and Church of the Brethren denomination?

References:

- All scripture quotations unless noted otherwise are taken from the Common English Bible, 2011.
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“SEED, SCATTERED & SOWN: Reaching Beyond this Generation”

BIBLE STUDY: Outdoor Ministries

AUTHOR: Sharon Flora

Text: Matthew 13 (Consider both the NRSV and The Message)

Overview of the Gospel of Matthew:

The author of Matthew is writing to second generation Christians for whom the synagogue had become a hostile place of worship. No longer was the Jewish/Christian community welcome, and so the writer both gives direction to the new church and affirms though Jewish rhetoric who Jesus is in the larger Jewish narrative. (*Harpers' Bible Commentary*)

World Behind the Text:

- Authorship - an unknown Jewish Christian
- Date - between A.D. 80 and 90, after Mark, the fall of the Temple and the expulsion of Jewish Christians from the synagogues
- Form - narrative (story telling), discourses (discussion) and parables (metaphors and similes)

World in the Text:

- Delineates ministries through the disciples and the growing opposition among the establishment.
- This Gospel stresses the Pharisees as Jesus' major opponents and accuses them of being hypocrites; it emphasizes righteousness that exceeds theirs and speaks of their scribes and their synagogues.
- Some of the disruption occurs internally within the new church including false prophets and Christians who want freedom from the obedience of the Torah and others who demonstrate little faith although they show a measure of understanding.

Questions: Parables of the Kingdom

1. What happens to the various seeds in the parable of the sower (13:1-9)? According to the interpretation in 13:18-23, why do these things happen?
 - a. Seeds on the path
 - b. Seeds on rocky soil
 - c. Seeds among the thorns
 - d. Seeds on good soil
2. Consider 13:10-17. What is the difference between seeing and perceiving, and between listening and understanding?
3. Consider 13:16-17. Do the disciples perceive Jesus' meaning or not?
4. Do you think Jesus' parables obscure his message or help proclaim it? Why?
5. Considering the audience of Matthew's Gospel, why would this parable be important?

A Guide Through the New Testament, Celia Brewer Marshal

Application:

- Consider the ministries offered by Camp Bethel. If participants have been campers or have worked/volunteered at the Camp, what stories do they have to share?
- Consider the story of the sower. What “characters” are present? (God, sower, seeds, birds, etc.) Who do we identify with? What characters may be necessary but are not named?

Connecting Camp Bethel and Mathew 13:

1. How does Camp Bethel illustrate the Parable of the Sower?
 - a. Consider the Summer Camp Program.
 - b. Consider the property and its use.
 - c. Consider the events held in the facilities.
2. People of all ages are part of the ministry of Camp Bethel. In what ways is God active (through us) in calling people to participate in those ministries?
3. Think back to who may be the “sowers.” How are the sowers called/involved in the outdoor ministries of the Virgina District/Camp Bethel?
4. How is the field prepared for planting at Camp Bethel? Why is this important? What role do we/I have in this?
5. Who are the persons preparing the field for sowing at the camp?
6. What is the seed being sown at Camp Bethel? (Consider the stories that were shared earlier.)
7. How does Camp Bethel play a vital role in the future of the Church? (Consider leadership development, Christian education, evangelism, discipleship, etc.)