



## *Fourth Sunday after Pentecost*

### *Father's Day*

June 20, 2021

*"Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seed...The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced."*

Mark 4:3, 18-19 (NLT)

See Our Father's Day Tribute Online

*"Stepping Up: A Father's Day Tribute"*

\*Call to Worship

*The Lord is the Sower of the seeds of love and redemption.*

***But we have not always been ready to receive these seeds.***

*Today we hear again the scriptures that remind us of the awesome generosity of God. Help us navigate our cluttered world.*

***Help us be good soil, O God,  
prepared to receive your love and to grow in that love.***

*Amen. AMEN.*

\*Praise

*"How Great Thou Art"*

UMH 77

### \*Opening Prayer

*God of small seeds and mighty plants, you take our meager lives and with your love cause them to produce acts of loving kindness for you in this world. You hear our cries and find us when we are lost and wandering in fear. You bring us home with you so that we may be made whole, rejoicing in your goodness. Help us to joyfully serve you all our days, knowing that you are always watching over us. Prepare our hearts to receive your word and our spirits to respond in eagerness to serve you. In Jesus' name, we pray. **Amen.***

### Share How You Can Present Your Offering to God

Make your offering personal...through a donation or an act of service...bring to God an offering of praise and gratitude!

#### Sing the Doxology Together

*Praise God, from whom all blessings flow; praise him, all creatures here below; praise him above, ye heavenly host; praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.*

### A Prayer for Father's Day

*Holy God, whom we call Father, we give you thanks for the people who have been our earthly fathers in this life, and we pray for all sorts and conditions of fathers.*

- ❖ *For fathers, who as a result of the pandemic, have faced even more challenges and stresses.*
- ❖ *For fathers who have striven to balance the demands of work, marriage, and children with an honest awareness of both joy and sacrifice.*
- ❖ *For fathers who, lacking a good model, have worked to become a good father.*
- ❖ *For fathers who by their own account were not always there for their children, but who continue to offer those children, now grown, their love and support.*
- ❖ *For fathers who have been wounded by the neglect and hostility of their children.*
- ❖ *For fathers who, despite divorce, have remained in their children's lives.*
- ❖ *For fathers whose children are adopted, and whose love and support has offered healing.*
- ❖ *For fathers who, as stepfathers, freely choose the obligation of fatherhood and earned their stepchildren's love and respect.*
- ❖ *For fathers who have lost a child to death, and continue to hold the child in their heart.*

- ❖ *For those men who have no children, but cherish the next generation as if they were their own.*
- ❖ *For those men who have "fathered" us in their role as mentors and guides.*
- ❖ *For those men who are about to become fathers; may they openly delight in their children.*
- ❖ *And for those fathers who have died, but live on in our memory and in the communion of your Saints, whose love continues to nurture us.*

*All this we ask in the name of your beloved Son. Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer

*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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.*

God's Word Mark 4:3; 7; 18-19 (NLT) (see below)

*The Word of God for the people of God...Thanks be to God!*

Message **"Thorny Soil"** Pastor Clark  
*...overcoming the dangers of a cluttered soul*  
See Message Below

\*Hymn of Faith **"Trust and Obey"** UMH 467

Blessing

*As you go from here, remember this:  
 God's love is from everlasting to everlasting,  
 from generation to generation.  
 Just as a father has compassion on his children  
 so God has compassion on those fear him,  
 who listen to his voice,  
 and who do his will.  
 Go out in the knowledge  
 that the everlasting love of God goes with you.  
 Amen.*

## **How Great Thou Art**

*O Lord my God, When I in awesome wonder,  
Consider all the worlds Thy Hands have made;  
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,  
Thy power throughout the universe displayed.*

*Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*When through the woods, and forest glades I wander,  
And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees.  
When I look down, from lofty mountain grandeur  
And see the brook, and feel the gentle breeze.*

*Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*And when I think, that God, His Son not sparing;  
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in;  
That on the Cross, my burden gladly bearing,  
He bled and died to take away my sin.*

*Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

*When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation,  
And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart.  
Then I shall bow, in humble adoration,  
And then proclaim: "My God, how great Thou art!"*

*Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art.  
Then sings my soul, My Savior God, to Thee,  
How great Thou art, How great Thou art!*

## ***Trust and Obey***

*1 When we walk with the Lord  
in the light of his word,  
what a glory he sheds on our way!  
While we do his good will,  
he abides with us still,  
and with all who will trust and obey.*

*Refrain:*

*Trust and obey, for there's no other way  
to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

*2 Not a burden we bear,  
not a sorrow we share,  
but our toil he doth richly repay;  
not a grief or a loss,  
not a frown or a cross,  
but is blest if we trust and obey. [Refrain]*

*3 But we never can prove  
the delights of his love  
until all on the altar we lay;  
for the favor he shows,  
for the joy he bestows,  
are for them who will trust and obey. [Refrain]*

*4 Then in fellowship sweet  
we will sit at his feet,  
or we'll walk by his side in the way;  
what he says we will do,  
where he sends we will go;  
never fear, only trust and obey. [Refrain]*

## ***The Thorny Soil: Overcoming the Dangers of a Cluttered Soul***

Mark 4:1-20 (NLT)

### ***Introduction***

***There is only one time in the Gospels when Jesus calls an individual, "Come, follow me," and the person says no.*** Can you guess who? To be sure, crowds refuse Jesus or walk away from him, but this is the only occasion when an individual denies Jesus' invitation. And what an invitation: Jesus looked him in the eye, loved him, embraced him, and said, *"Come, follow me."*

But the texts say the young man walked away sad. Jesus' invitation was too much for him. He had too much baggage, ***too much clutter***, too many nonessentials that he held on to, or as we might say, held him captive. As a result, he could not see the beauty or goodness of Christ's call. Christ's words, *"Come, follow me,"* were drowned out by the clutter and the nonessentials.

The Rich Young Ruler, as he is named, is a poster child for today's look at the third of the four soils in Mark 4:1-20. The seed of the gospel, Jesus' invitation to come and follow, germinated and stirred a desire to seek God. But unfortunately, it was crowded out by all the clutter that resided in the soul of this man.

The seed that fell among the thorny soil is depicted in verse 7 and then again in verses 18-19 where Jesus is offering his explanation of the parable to his disciples.

*"Other seed fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants so they produced no grain."* Mark 4:7 (NLT)

*"The seed that fell among the thorns represents others who hear God's word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life, the lure of wealth, and the desire for other things, so no fruit is produced."* Mark 4:18-19 (NLT)

These verses and the life of the Rich Young Ruler show us what a cluttered soul looks like. It got me thinking: ***what clutters our souls today?*** Obviously, of all people in the course of human civilization, we in the United States are the most cluttered culture ever. I think that goes without saying.

I wanted to probe a little more deeply as to why we are so cluttered of soul. In a brainstorming session one morning this past week, I came up with a list of things that clutter our American souls. I came up with a top ten list along with some key indicators you might be dealing with a thorny situation in your soul.

## **Top Ten List of What Clutters Our Souls**

1. **Too much stuff!** And with that an **unhealthy attachment** to that stuff! We equate happiness with our possessions. **Indicator:** stuffed storage in our closets, garages, sheds, and public storage units are telling.
2. **Overcrowded schedules.** We don't feel alive unless we are scurrying around. **Indicators:** a close look at our calendars is revealing, and, as we have noted in recent weeks, hurry sickness. Another indicator: no Sabbath practices or patterns.
3. **Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)** that leads to a multiplicity of commitments. **Indicator:** spread too thin to fully meet all our commitments.
4. **Excessive screen time:** TV/Tablets/Phones/Video Games/Apps. **Indicator:** when the very first thing you think about when you are traveling is internet connectivity or answering this question, can you go a day with any screen time?
5. **Social Media:** we have cultivated a plethora of very shallow relationships but have little time or inclination to cultivate deeper ones. **Indicator:** our tendency to skim our relationships.
6. **Over-Stimulated Brains:** In our constantly weary condition, we need stimulants to keep us going. **Indicator:** heavy reliance on caffeine, energy drinks, and drugs.
7. **An Obsession with Money:** it occupies too much of our thoughts and attention. **Indicator:** we pay more attention to our accounts and investments than we do the health of our souls.
8. **Distractions:** we are the most distracted culture ever! **Indicator:** our attention spans are shorter and shorter year-by-year. You've heard of the dangers of texting while driving, now consider the dangers of texting while walking or riding a bike...(share stats)...
9. **Tsunami of Robo Calls and Spam Email:** These torment our very existence! **Indicator:** the profound degree of how annoyed by these unwanted intrusions into our privacy. An illustration of this...in 2019 40% of all calls were scammers; in 2018 nearly 50% of the more than 250 billion emails sent worldwide were spam!
10. **Stress and Discontentment:** this started out on my indicator list but rose to such alarming levels that it became one of the top ten things that clutters our souls. It is its own indicator!

Woe! What a graphic description of thorns in current life! That's a load to deal with, isn't it? We are an over-stuffed and over-stressed, a distracted and discontent society.

This parable reminds us that some seed fell among thorns and weeds. These thorns and weeds grow up and choke the life out of the plants. "Jesus said that this is the condition where the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth and the desire for other things come in and choke the soul."

This season of the soul is the season of cluttered distraction. All number of competing allegiances crowd out the seed of God's Word. Jesus names a few of these thorny distractions:

## ***The Thorns We Contend With; Weeds that Clutter the Garden of Our Soul***

- ***Worries of This Life***

According to the *New York Times*, **Americans are among the most anxious people on earth.** One expert said, *"If you wanted to create an environment to churn out angsty people, we've done it."*

Don't you see? Things—earthly treasures, people, relationships—do not eliminate worry. **They only serve to heighten it.** Herein lies the great paradox of Americans. We're regarded as one of the richest nations in the world, yet issues like worry and anxiety and depression are on the rise among us.

Even more tragic: All of that worry crowds out our hearing of the good news. It literally means *"to divide the mind!"* How is worry suffocating your heart and mind and soul?

- ***Riches or the Deceitfulness of Wealth and Power***

Listen to Solomon, said to be the wealthiest person ever to live:

*"I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well—the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. **Yet** when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, **everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.**"* Ecclesiastes 2:8-11

- ***Pleasures of This World/Desires for Other Things***

Are you distracted away from what is most important? Are you caught up in things that have nothing to do with your calling as a Christian? Is your mind preoccupied by sports, games, (particularly video games), entertainment, politics, business, hobby, or the like? Do the things you engage with on a day-to-day basis help or hurt your Christian walk? Are your everyday activities bringing you closer or farther from Christ?

A 100-pound **young Black Bear** in Jamison City, Pennsylvania got into unexpected trouble when he found an old plastic jar. The jar contained cooking oil and the bear couldn't resist the temptation so he stuck his head inside to get a few licks. Unfortunately for the bear, his head got stuck in the jar and remained stuck for at least 11 days. Mike Jurbala, a 68-year-old local resident, summarized the situation: "[The bear] put his head in, and had a problem. He'd have died in a couple more days."



Area residents first spotted the bear with the red jar on its head on June 3, 2013. The bear eluded the local game wardens, but Jurbala and three other local residents, using a rope and a flashlight, kept pursuing the bear. "You knew where he was," Jurbala said, "because you could hear him banging into things." As the bear lumbered through the darkness, bashing into trees and rocks, the rescue team finally cornered him in a resident's backyard, where it ended up falling into a pool a couple of times. Eventually, they wrangled the animal into a position where another rescuer named Jody Boyle yanked the jar off his head.

We too run into danger when we stick our heads into stuff that we cannot shake free from!

### ***What's at Stake?***

Our souls get suffocated. All that stuff and all that stress crowds out the good of the good news. I have found a word that captures the danger of this threat: our souls get **strangled!** No roots can deepen, no life can develop, no fruit can grow.

The Brazilian walnut tree is majestic in size and strength. But this beautiful tree has one enemy, the **strangler fig**. When a strangler fig-seed lands on the walnut tree, its roots begin to descend to the ground. As it grows, the vines of the fig squeeze and choke the walnut tree. The fig's grip on the tree becomes so great that the vine-encased tree slowly dies. Over time, all that is left are twisting vines in the form of a tree. The tree itself has long since disintegrated. Only a vine structure in the shape of a tree remains, while the inside is hollow and lifeless.

What a haunting image! Our souls are in danger of being strangled!

### ***How to Overcome This Thorny Soil Predicament***

- **Humble Yourself:** We all deal with this battle! It stalks our souls!

*"So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor. Give all your worries and cares to God, for he cares about you."* 1 Peter 5:6-7 (NLT)

- **Listen:** Hear the Word of the Lord...let him or her who has ears, to hear

*"Then he said, 'Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.'"* Mark 4:9 (NLT)

- **Trust:** Trust God to supply what stuff cannot; all that other stuff is pure deceit!

*"Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment."* 1 Timothy 6:17 (NLT)

- **Let Go:** Let go of anything that cannot fulfill what it promises...for some this might feel like low-key letting go of what we recognize as unhealthy for our souls; for others this might feel like

major soul-surgery when we need the Great Physician to cut out the unhealthy attachment to stuff!

*“Anything which distracts us from the best becomes a weed!” Ellsworth Kalas*

*“Then he said to the crowd, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. <sup>24</sup> If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it.’” Luke 9:23-24 (NLT)*

- **Give:** The best antidote to this thorny situation is to become a generous giver!

*“Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. <sup>18</sup> Tell them to use their money to do good. They should be rich in good works and generous to those in need, always being ready to share with others. <sup>19</sup> By doing this they will be storing up their treasure as a good foundation for the future so that they may experience true life.” 1 Timothy 6:17-19 (NLT)*

## **Conclusion**

Imagine your house is on fire and you only have three minutes to get out. You can only take with you things that you're able to carry on your back. What will you take? If you are married, I hope you take your spouse. If you have children, they all have to come, too. Your pet/s too.

But what else would you take out? I wrote down what I would take. I have a small file cabinet filled with important documents. It has our family's social security cards, our titles to our car and the house, our passports, our birth certificates, and so forth. I would try to lug that up out of the basement. I would also take my wallet, my laptop computer, and some important photos. I might like to take my journals...but that would take too long. Some of you might take a musical instrument, your iPhone, or some jewelry that has high sentimental value. But we all would leave behind everything we felt was nonessential.

This exercise unclutters our souls! It gives us a pretty good indicator of what we really need! Can we live free from the clutter that strangles our souls?