

“Our House Churches on Good Soil”

6th Sunday after Pentecost

July 12, 2020

**By Rev. Floren“Tino” C. Cordova, Pastor
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**Romans 8:1-11
Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23**

Poem: *Established Roots* by Regina Elliott

The towering regal maple,
with June adolescent leaves,
established roots,
stretched into earth's bosom,
draws of the gifts of rains
in spring's benevolence,
and snow from wintertide's
barren soul,
January's winds bend the stately
maple's mighty trunk.

Established roots of a king's presence,
it's stillness presides over July's
church picnics,
children climbing it's lower branches,
and lovers' vows,
people are born, grow up, betrothed,
we'd, some bear children, grandchildren,
then sleep in the soil, under the grasses
of all seasons,
and the maple's boughs go on
reaching higher for the peaks

of clouds that yield to heaven's
perfection of solace.

Growing a garden requires the daily tenderness touch and cooperation from any sources. The seed needs to be viable and ready to be planted into the earth's bosom. The earth needs to surround the seed with nourishment, absorb the water coming from above whether it is from a garden hose or from the clouds in the sky. Water helps the seed soften so that whatever is inside, can begin to sprout its roots downward into the fertilized soil and the main shoot moves upward through the soil to seek the warmth of the sun. From germination to growing – the seed relies on many sources for it to become a successful, well nourished, good producing plant – soil, fertilizer, sun, water – and maybe some tender loving care from us. What could possibly go wrong?

You see beloved community, like most of life, plants require a balance. Too much of anyone source can be harmful – (like too much fertilizer) – or too little of any one source can also be harmful. There is a balance required for all of life – no matter the species.

When the church as a whole is doing well in its call from God – people are being fed, thirsts are being quenched, justice is being sought, all are being comforted – there's always evil lurking around the corner, waiting to knock the church off of the good soil. Our good fruit – our good plant of being the church – and the church itself may be scorched or thorny bushes are being planted within the church to choke the church from the inside.

The more we are focused on our call and on our mission statement, the more likely that evil lurks around us. Some of our sheep fall prey to doubt,

anger, fear – and this is how a church that is doing everything right, falls prey to being scorched or choked from within. As we recall our Gospel reading this morning, if we are not careful – what is in our hearts may get snatched away.

Fear not Iao Church – we have ears to listen – Amen? Let us “hear then the parable of the sower.” But first, I want to tell you this story about a couple who bought a new home. The owner began to landscape the lawn himself. Since it was his first attempt to plant a lawn, he was careful to do everything according to the book. He prepared the soil, put in a very nice, top of the line sprinkling system, and then waited for the right day. When that day came, he seeded the lawn, rolled it, and watered it – excited to see the fruits of his labor come up in grass form. For the next three weeks he watered the lawn daily, shooed away the birds and his cat, especially his cat, and waited eagerly for the first blades of grass to peek through. Except for a few weeds, nothing happened. Then one Saturday morning he discovered the sack of grass seed - still in the garage. "What in the world did you plant?" his wife asked. With a sigh, the man replied, “Kitty litter.”

If we are going to plant something Iao Church – let us make sure it is not kitty litter – Amen? Let us make sure we do not plant seeds of fear, seeds of doubt, of despair or of anger. Let us make sure we are planting the seed of the Gospel in our hearts, in the hearts of people we encounter in our daily lives, and make sure we plant the seed of the Gospel in our beloved Church we call Iao UCC through our words and actions. If given a chance – the seed of the Gospel will grow with the sources of faith, truth, trust and most of all our source of love.

Iao Church, we cannot be sure that the crowds out on our beaches who hear or see us will listen. All we can do is tell our Iao story to anyone who will listen, but we must not only tell our story, we must believe in it as well. All we can do is move forward in being the church of the Gospel. We cannot and should never make a claim to be a perfect church or a church that has all the answers. In fact, we should be able to say that – sometimes, we notice that our church is on rocky grounds – and we do get scorched at times. Sometimes we notice that our church is amongst thorny bushes and we get choked at times. We don't always agree with one another, but we always love one another. Our diversity as a church is what makes us strong. When we fall short – we pick each other up and move to good soil once again. We remember our call and our mission and remember the seed of the Gospel in us as a church.

Let us close with this. In our modern time we are now called to plant the seed of the Gospel from our House Churches. Remembering this phrase – “the church is not closed; it is on deployment.” The current Iao United Church of Christ at this very moment in time finds itself writing its new chapters for the history book for all future generations to read about from the House Churches. Against all odds, evil has tried to shut us down, but Iao Church continues to focus on mission and ministry and finding creative ways of “being” the church. We are planted on good soil, our sources of being the church are rooted in strong faith, faith in each other, faith in our community partners, faith and trust in our ultimate Divine source – the source rooted in Jesus the resurrected Christ as stated in the Gospels. As we continue with the effects of COVID19, now is the time for us to remember that our Church is

firmly planted in earth's bosom and are called to reach skyward for God's ever-loving nourishment. "But as for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it, who indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty." This tells us that no matter how much fruit each one of us yields – all is for the benefit of fulfilling our call – to plant good seeds, not kitty litter.

Amen, Amene, Ashe, A-ho, and Alleluia.