

**ST. JOHN UNITED CHURCH**  
A UNITED METHODIST/PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (USA) COMMUNITY  
**WILDE LAKE INTERFAITH CENTER • COLUMBIA, MARYLAND**  
**UNITED IN LOVE – UNITED FOR SERVICE**

**July 16, 2023**

SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST // IN-PERSON & ONLINE SERVICE

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**Guest preacher: Ms. Lori James, Locust UMC and PATH**

Liturgist: Jordan Randall

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**WE GATHER IN GOD’S NAME**

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PRELUDE

Patricia Hammer  
Accompanist

WORDS OF WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

OPENING SONG

“Marching to Zion”

GTG #733  
Ingrid Sampson, guitar

Come, we that love the Lord, and let our joys be known  
Join in a song with sweet accord  
Join in a song with sweet accord  
And thus surround the throne  
And thus surround the throne

***Chorus:***

*We're marching to Zion  
Beautiful, beautiful Zion  
We're marching upward to Zion  
The beautiful city of God*

Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God  
But children of the heavenly King  
But children of the heavenly King  
May speak their joys abroad  
May speak their joys abroad

***Chorus***

The hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets  
Before we reach the heavenly fields  
Before we reach the heavenly fields  
Or walk the golden streets  
Or walk the golden streets

***Chorus***

Then let our songs abound and every tear be dry  
We're marching through Emmanuel's ground  
We're marching through Emmanuel's ground  
To fairer worlds on high  
To fairer worlds on high

***Chorus***

CALL TO WORSHIP

God scatters the seeds of reconciliation and love, and waits....

**So much of it lands on flat pathways or rocky roads and won't take root....**

God scatters the seeds of healing and hope, and waits....

**Shallowness and fear claim the seeds and they cannot live.**

God scatters the seeds of redemption and peace, and waits....

**These are the places of deep growth where the seed will cast down strong roots.**

Welcome this day to a seed-scattering moment!

**May our hearts be the rich soil in which God's love takes root. AMEN.**

OPENING PRAYER

**Lord, you know us so well. We thank you for your presence in our lives, even when we don't recognize it. This day we have gathered, coming from a week of unexpected happenings and events which have surprised us. Make us ready to become stronger witnesses for your love as we receive your word and find our spirits and lives healed. AMEN.**

SCRIPTURE READING 1

Isaiah 43:18 – 19

ANTHEM

“Tree Song”

SJU Women's Choir

*Ken Medema; arr. Robert Sterling*

I saw a tree by the riverside one day as I walked along  
Straight as an arrow and pointing to the sky  
Growing tall and strong  
"How do you grow so tall and strong?" I said to the riverside tree  
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me:

**Refrain:**

*I've got roots growing down to the water  
I've got leaves growing up to the sunshine  
And the fruit that I bear is a sign of the life in me  
I am shade from the hot summer sundown  
I am nest for the birds of the heaven  
I'm becoming what the Lord of Trees has meant me to be  
A strong young tree*

I saw a tree in the wintertime when snow lay on the ground  
Straight as an arrow and pointing to the sky  
And winter winds blew all around  
"How do you stay so tall and strong?" I said to the wintertime tree  
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me:

**Refrain**

I saw a tree in the city streets where buildings blocked the sun  
Green and lovely, I could see it gave joy to everyone  
"How do you grow in the city streets?" I said to the downtown tree  
This is the song that my tree friend sang to me:

**Refrain**

SCRIPTURE READING 2

Matthew 13:1 – 9, 18 – 23

TIME WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH

Ms. Lori James

MESSAGE

“IMAGINING A NEW REALITY”

MS. Lori James

OFFERTORY SONG OF REFLECTION

“Thy Word is a Lamp”

GTG #458

**Refrain:**

*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path  
(2x)*

When I feel afraid, and I think I've lost my way  
Still you're there right beside me  
Nothing will I fear as long as you are near  
Please be near me to the end

**Refrain**

CALL TO GENEROSITY

God of creation and gardens, thank you for all the blessings you have poured into our lives.  
Receive these gifts that they may become seeds of hope and love. AMEN.

CLOSING SONG

“Hymn of Promise”

GTG #250

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

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

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

BENEDICTION

As you have received the seeds of faith and hope; go now into God's world to scatter the  
seeds of reconciliation and peace, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.  
AMEN.

POSTLUDE

Patricia Hammer  
accompanist

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*Readings are NRSV unless otherwise noted. CEB=Common English Bible; CEV=Contemporary English Version;  
KJV=King James Version; MSG=The Message; NIV=New International Version; NLT=New Living Translation;  
TIB=The Inclusive Bible*

**Isaiah 43:18 – 19**

<sup>18</sup> Do not remember the former things  
or consider the things of old.  
<sup>19</sup> I am about to do a new thing;  
now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
and rivers in the desert.

## Matthew 13:1 – 9, 18 – 23

13:1 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea.

13:2 Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

13:3 And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow.

13:4 And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

13:5 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.

13:6 But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away.

13:7 Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them.

13:8 Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

13:9 Let anyone with ears listen!"

13:18 "Hear then the parable of the sower.

13:19 When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what is sown in the heart; this is what was sown on the path.

13:20 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy;

13:21 yet such a person has no root, but endures only for a while, and when trouble or persecution arises on account of the word, that person immediately falls away.

13:22 As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the lure of wealth choke the word, and it yields nothing.

13:23 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."

