

Coping with COVID

Weekly Bible Study and Congregational Update

St. John United Church of Christ
New Athens, Illinois

Week of July 5
Issue 15

A Look at the Lectionary...

The Scripture readings for this week, to my mind at least, are about God's ability to bring life and hope out of situations where we believe that's impossible.

- In Genesis, the second born son supplants the first.
- In Psalm 119, the writer is stumbling in the dark, suffering, doubting, and yet, in the end, finds joy in his or her faith.
- Paul writes to the Romans about the saving hope that Christians have in Jesus Christ, whose spirit can restore to life even those once thought dead in their sins.
- Finally, in Matthew, Jesus shares his wonderful story of the sower, the seed, and the ground, pointing out that, even in the midst of considerable failure, there is yet hope for a good harvest wherever God's word is planted.

Genesis 25 tells the story of Isaac and Rebekah and their sons Jacob and Esau. In this week's reading, Jacob plays on Esau's hunger and impulsiveness to have Esau give up his rights as the firstborn and cede them to Jacob, the second born – all because the pot of lentil stew and fresh-baked bread that Jacob made smelled so good, and Esau was so hungry.

The story leaves us wondering how often we squander the gifts that God gives us for a shortsighted and short-lived pleasure that all too soon fades, leaving us hungry and empty yet again.

Romans 8 begins with one of the greatest affirmations of faith in the New Testament, Paul's promise that, for those who are in Jesus Christ, there is "now no condemnation." Paul sees human life as a struggle between those who live according to the flesh and those who live their lives with spiritual priorities. The one way leads to death. The other leads, not just to life, but to eternal life. Even more powerfully and more importantly, the new life that the risen Christ offers is a gift in the here and now.

In Matthew 13, Jesus pictures a farmer scattering seed across his fields. Some seed accidentally lands on the road, where birds eat it. Others land in rocky soil where they quickly sprout but just as quickly die. Thorns and weeds choke out still more seed. Thankfully, some seed ends up in good soil and produces a crop for harvest.

Jesus explains that the seed thrown on the path is those who hear the word but, before it has a chance to take root, have the seed snatched away by evil. The seed in rocky soil are those who hear the word with joy but fall away when they face tough times. The seed sown among weeds stands for those who hear the word but then have it choked out by worldly cares and loves. Finally, the seed that lands on good soil is those who hear the word, understand it, and live it out in their lives.

That leaves the verses from Psalm 119. Verse 105 stands out for me this week. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." There would be no need for a light were there no darkness. Darkness is part of creation, present, so Genesis says, even before God called light into being. The question is how we find our way through it.

The psalmist speaks of being severely afflicted, and of the wicked laying a snare. For this person at that time, darkness wasn't balanced by light, but instead seemed to be overpowering it.

By the end of the psalm, though, the writer finds hope in God's word promises to "perform God's statutes forever, to the end."

As we cope with a raging pandemic we can, like the psalmist, feel afflicted and spend our days trying to avoid the snares we're sure are all around us.

While we do live in the midst of unprecedented danger, we are still people of faith. We build our hope on God's word as well as on the promise of Christ's resurrection and his presence with us now, in ways we too often both fail to see and appreciate.

Pastor Bob



Genesis 25:19-34

These are the descendants of Isaac, Abraham's son: Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac was forty years old when he married Rebekah, daughter of Bethuel the Aramean of Paddan-aram, sister of Laban the Aramean.

Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD granted his prayer, and his wife Rebekah conceived. The children struggled together within her; and she said, "If it is to be this way, why do I live?" So she went to inquire of the LORD.

And the LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples born of you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the elder shall serve the younger."

When her time to give birth was at hand, there were twins in her womb. The first came out red, all his body like a hairy mantle; so they named him Esau. Afterward his brother came out, with his hand gripping Esau's heel; so he was named Jacob.

Isaac was sixty years old when she bore them. When the boys grew up, Esau was a skillful hunter, a man of the field, while Jacob was a quiet man, living in tents. Isaac loved Esau, because he was fond of game; but Rebekah loved Jacob.

Once when Jacob was cooking a stew, Esau came in from the field, and he was famished.

Esau said to Jacob, "Let me eat some of that red stuff, for I am famished!" (Therefore he was called Edom.)

Jacob said, "First sell me your birthright."

Esau said, "I am about to die; of what use is a birthright to me?"

Jacob said, "Swear to me first."

So he swore to him, and sold his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and lentil stew, and he ate and drank, and rose and went his way. Thus, Esau despised his birthright.

Psalms 119:105-112

- ❖ Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.
- ❖ I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, to observe your righteous ordinances.
- ❖ I am severely afflicted; give me life, O LORD, according to your word.
- ❖ Accept my offerings of praise, O LORD, and teach me your ordinances.
- ❖ I hold my life in my hand continually, but I do not forget your law.
- ❖ The wicked have laid a snare for me, but I do not stray from your precepts.
- ❖ Your decrees are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart.
- ❖ I incline my heart to perform your statutes forever, to the end.

Romans 8:1-11

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do by

sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason, the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law--indeed it cannot, and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. Such great crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat there, while the whole crowd stood on the beach.

And he told them many things in parables, saying "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up.

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

"Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen!"

"Hear then the parable of the sower. 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.

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

"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.

"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."

What to Expect When Returning to In-Person Worship

***St. John United Church of Christ
New Athens, Illinois***

Before You Go to Church

- ✓ Remember to register with the church office (475-2947). In order to keep our attendance at or below the 50-person limit, only those who signed up in advance will be admitted. ***Reservations for worship on July 19 will start being taken Monday, July 13.***
- ✓ If you call to sign up and the headcount for that Sunday is full, your name will be placed on a waiting list for the following week, which will be filled on a first-come, first-reserved basis. If we consistently run out of room and there is enough interest, an additional service may be scheduled in the future.
- ✓ PLEASE DON'T COME TO CHURCH IF YOU'RE ILL OR NOT FEELING WELL

When You Get to Church

- ✓ Doors will be open about 20 minutes before worship begins at 8 AM
- ✓ Please be patient as our greeters take your temperature, check to make sure you're among those who registered, and help you sanitize your hands.
- ✓ THE WEARING OF MASKS IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED AT ALL TIMES.
Please remember that, by wearing a mask, you're protecting your neighbor from unintentional infection. If you don't have a mask, one will be provided for you when you arrive.
- ✓ Observe social distancing at all times.
- ✓ Ushers will take you to your seat and dismiss you at the end of worship, filling pews from the front before the service, and dismissing people from the rear at the end to minimize contact.

During Worship

- ✓ Please don't change seats.
- ✓ Please don't leave unless absolutely necessary.

- ✓ Be prepared for a “new normal,” at least for the foreseeable future. That will mean, in part:
 - A shorter than normal worship service
 - No hymnals or bulletins
 - No singing or spoken responses
 - No passing of the peace beyond a friendly wave
 - No lingering in the foyer before or after worship
 - No passing of the collection plate. Please leave your offering in the box provided at the rear of the sanctuary.
- ✓ When we celebrate communion, we will do so with sealed cups distributed by an usher as you enter the sanctuary.

After the Service

- ✓ Be sure to take all personal items with you.
- ✓ Wait for an usher to dismiss you.
- ✓ Don't linger in the foyer or outside the church doors.
- ✓ Please leave your mask on until you're outside and away from others.

Worship under COVID will require extra volunteers,
a minimum of two to usher and two to help with screening.
You can volunteer to help when you call in your reservation. Thanks!

While the Church Council, staff, and volunteers at St. John's will do their best to follow public health guidelines, anyone attending worship should understand that they assume the danger of contracting COVID-19 anytime they enter a public space. No matter how many precautions we may take, we cannot eliminate the risk of infection.

Worship in our sanctuary resumes on July 19 *with an 8 AM service.*

Zoom worship will follow at 9:15 AM. The log in info remains the same:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/815064120>,
Meeting ID: 815 064 120

You can also participate in worship by calling (312) 626 6799
on your cellphone or landline and entering the meeting ID.

To share your prayer concerns and joys,
call the church office at 475-2947,
text or call Pastor Bob at (618) 402-8013,
or email him at stjohnucc@att.net.

Tom May is also continuing
our Prayer Partners ministry.
Email him at samtum@att.net.



- Gene Whaley continues his ongoing battle with cancer, as does Kim Juenger. Dave Park has been fighting not just leukemia, but also the side effects of the drugs used to treat it.
- David Mehrtens, Pastor Bob's cousin, has undergone a bone marrow transplant, and is waiting to see how effective it is fighting his cancer.
- Sandy Cummins and Tom Kohnen are still both on transplant waiting lists.
- Bill Jones was hospitalized this week, but has returned home and is feeling much better.
- Darlene Connor will undergo hip replacement surgery July 9.
- In person visits with residents at the New Athens Home for the Aged are now possible, outside, observing social distancing. Please continue to hold all residents and staff in prayer.
- We have several nurses and health care workers in our congregation. Please pray for them and for all those putting themselves on the front lines of the pandemic to keep others healthy and safe.
- Birthday wishes and blessings to Corine Albert, our congregation's oldest member, who recently celebrated her 100th birthday.



- These folks are on our prayer calendar this week:
 - June Loesche
 - Kadie Long
 - Vickie and Gerald Luter
 - Trish and Charles Lynch
 - Chris Lynch
 - Debbie Main
 - Katie and Ed Main, and Emma
 - Juliann Main
 - Sherry and Russell Main
 - Vic and Lee Main
 - Terisa and Jim Marlow
 - Lucas Marlow
 - Abby Marlow
- ***We'll celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion this Sunday, July 12 via Zoom.*** Sealed cups containing grape juice and a wafer can be picked up at the church office.
- ***Our Capital Campaign volunteers will also be commissioned this Sunday.*** A large, hard-working group of volunteers, co-chaired by Scott Harriss and Keith Reuss, are well on their way to meeting our goal of kicking off the delayed capital campaign in September.
- ***The Church Council rescheduled our Chicken Dinner for August 16.*** There will be no dine in service offered, only drive through and carry out. Mark you calendars now, and watch for more details.
- ***Pastor Bob sends out daily meditations*** as well as news and announcements. If you'd like to be included, call or text him at (618) 402-8013.
- ***Members are urged to continue with their contributions as best they're able.*** A form for Vanco electronic giving is included with this issue of the COVID mailing. Members can also download the GivePlus app on both Android and Apple devices, and enable electronic giving in that way.
- ***Please feel free to call or text Pastor Bob's cell phone at (618) 402-8013 if you'd like to talk.*** The church office will continue to be open—though, like anything else these days, the schedule is subject to change. Feel free to stop by, but call before you visit just to be sure someone is here (475-2947).

CESNA is distributing summer food baskets to families in the New Athens school district. Here's their needs list:

- Breakfast foods
(Breakfast bars, Pop-Tarts, etc. No cereal needed at this time.)
- Tuna Helper
- Canned beef stew
- Canned chicken and dumplings
- Peanut butter
- Ramen Noodles
- Canned ravioli
- Macaroni and cheese
- Canned potatoes

Right now there is a special need for canned fruit. Please leave any donations on the table in the church library Thanks!

Because We All Could Use a Laugh...

An old man was on his death bed, and wanted to be buried with his money. He called his pastor, his doctor and his lawyer to his bedside. "Here's \$30,000 cash to be held by each of you. I trust you to put this in my coffin when I die so I can take all my money with me."

At the funeral, each man put an envelope in the coffin. Riding away in a limousine, the pastor suddenly broke into tears and confessed, "I only put \$20,000 into the envelope because I needed \$10,000 to repair the roof of the church."

"Well, since we're confiding in each other," said the doctor, "I only put \$10,000 in the envelope because we needed a new X-ray machine for the pediatrics ward at the hospital which cost \$20,000."

The lawyer was aghast. "I'm ashamed of both of you," he exclaimed. "I want it known that when I put my envelope in that coffin, I enclosed a check for the full \$30,000."

One recent Sunday, a young boy arrived to his Sunday school class late.

His teacher knew that the boy was usually very prompt and asked him if anything was wrong.

The boy replied no, that he was going to go fishing, but that his dad told him that he needed to go to church instead.

The teacher was very impressed and asked the boy if his father had explained to him why it was more important to go to church rather than to go fishing.

To which the boy replied, "Yes, ma'am, he did. My dad said that he didn't have enough bait for both of us."

Thanksgiving Day was drawing near, and a family had received a Thanksgiving card with a painting of a pilgrim family on its way to church.

Grandma showed the card to her small grandchildren and said, "The pilgrim children liked to go to church with their mothers and fathers."

"Oh, yeah?" her grandson replied, "So, why is their dad carrying that rifle?"

Three sons left home, went out on their own and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly Mother.

The first said, "I built a big house for our Mother."

The second said, "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver."

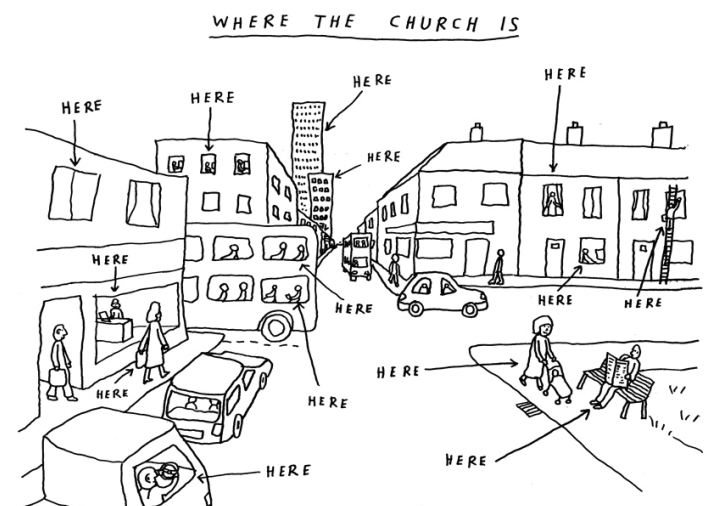
The third smiled and said, "I've got you both beat. You remember how Mom enjoyed reading the Bible? And you know she can't see very well any more. I sent her a remarkable parrot that recites the entire Bible. He's one of a kind. Mama just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot recites it."

Soon thereafter, Mom sent out her letters of thanks.

"Milton," she wrote one son, "the house you built is so huge. I live in only one room, but I have to clean the whole house."

"Gerald," she wrote to another, "I am too old to travel any more. My eyesight isn't what it used to be. I stay most of the time at home, so I rarely use the Mercedes. And the driver is so rude!"

"Dearest Donald," she wrote to her third son, "you have the good sense to know what your Mother likes. The chicken was delicious!"



Daily Bible Readings

Sunday: Acts 6-9

Monday: Isaiah 55-57

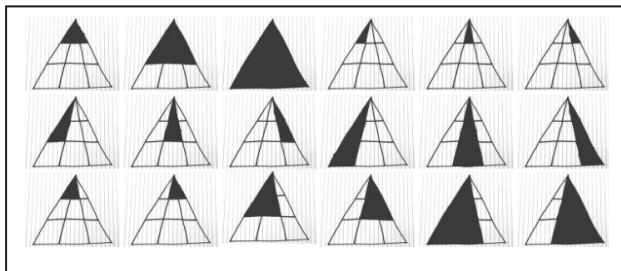
Tuesday: Isaiah 58-60

Wednesday: Isaiah 61-63

Thursday: Isaiah 64-66

Friday: Micah 1-4

Saturday: Psalms 76-78



Solution to last week's triangle puzzle: 18

WHAT BOOKS IN THE BIBLE DO NOT HAVE THE LETTERS B-I-B-L-E IN THEM? (Answer below)

PAIRS IN THE BIBLE

Using a pen or pencil, draw lines to connect well-known pairs in the Bible. (Answers below)

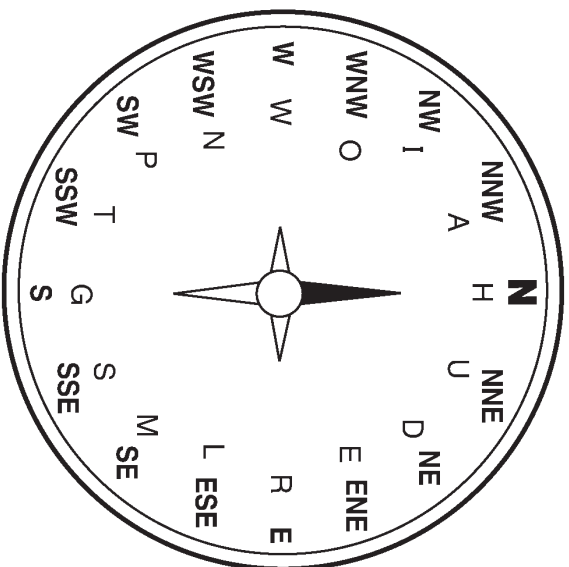
SAMSON	FISHES
WATER	GOLIATH
LOAVES	ESAU
ADAM	WINE
PAUL	RACHEL
DAVID	SILAS
MARY	MARTHA
CAIN	AARON
LEAH	DELILAH
MOSES	ABEL
JACOB	EVE

BOOKS IN THE BIBLE: Joshua, Ruth, Psalms, Song of Solomon, Amos, Jonah, Nahum, Mark, Acts, Romans, John, 1,2,3 John. **PAIRS:** Samson/Delilah, water/wine, loaves/fishes, Adam/Eve, Paul/Silas, David/Goliath, Mary/Martha, Cain/Abel, Leah/Rachel, Moses/Aaron, Jacob/Esau



Then Jesus explained to the crowd what this parable meant. Find out who the "good soil" is!

Use this compass code to fill in the blanks.



“ _____
 SW ENE WNW SW ESE ENE

 W N WNW N ENE NNW E SSW N ENE

 W WNW E NE NNW WSW NE

NNE WSW NE ENE E SSE SSW NNW WSW NE NW SSW _____”



Children's Worship
Bulletin™

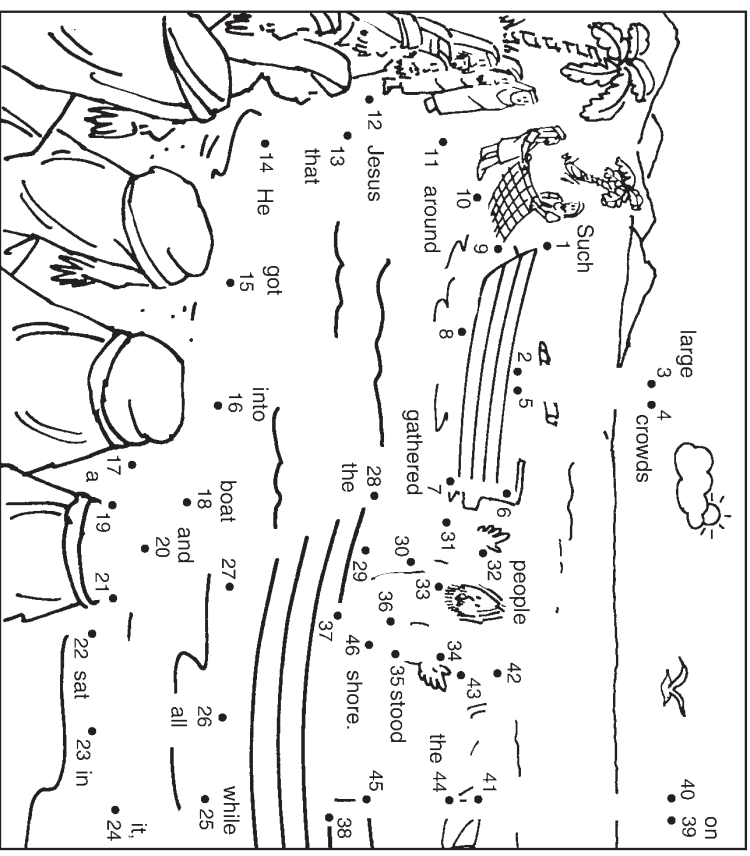
Ages 7+

July 12, 2020 • Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

The Parable of the Sower

Jesus sat by a lake. Many people gathered around Him. What did Jesus do?

Connect the dots and read the words along the way.



Jesus told the crowd a parable.



Fill in the blanks below with words from the box. Then match the description with the correct picture.

ate	crop	grew	seed	birds	choked	plants	quickly	withered
sow	tell	path	soil	other	farmer	sprang	produced	scattering
sun	good	root	among	rocky	places	thorns	scorched	

1. "A _____ went out to _____ his

_____. As he was _____

the seed, some _____ along the _____,

and the _____ came and _____ it up.

2. Some fell on _____, _____,

where it did not have much _____. It

_____ up _____...

3. But when the _____ came up, the

_____ were _____,

and they _____ because they

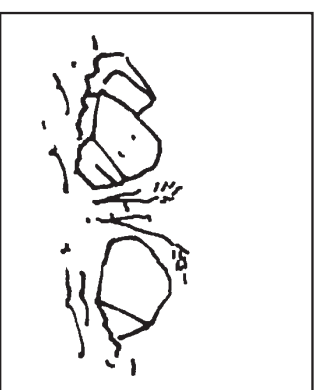
had no _____.

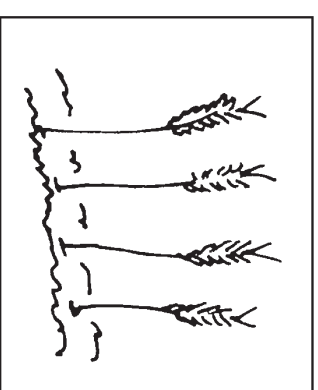
4. Other seed fell _____,

which _____ up and _____ the plants.

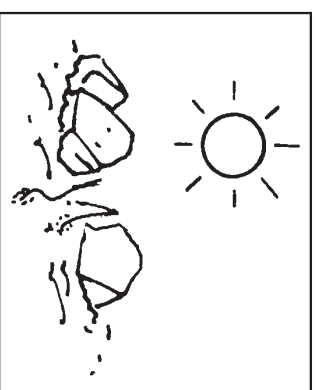
5. Still _____ seed fell on _____ soil,

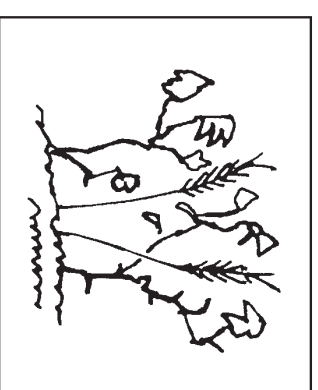
where it _____ a _____."











AUTHORIZATION FORM

Name of the organization: **St. John United Church of Christ, New Athens, IL**

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY		ENVELOPE/DONOR #	DATE
Effective date of authorization: ____/____/____ Type of authorization: <input type="checkbox"/> New authorization <input type="checkbox"/> Change donation amount <input type="checkbox"/> Change donation date <input type="checkbox"/> Change banking information <input type="checkbox"/> Discontinue electronic donation			
Last Name		First Name	
Address			
City		State	Zip
Email Address			
Date of first donation: ____/____/____ Date of last donation (optional): ____/____/____	Frequency of donation: (please check one) <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly on the 1 st <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly on the 15 th <input type="checkbox"/> Bi-Weekly (every other week) <input type="checkbox"/> One Time		Amount of first donation: \$ ____ Amount of last donation (optional): \$ ____
CHECKING / SAVINGS	Please debit my donation from my (check one): <input type="checkbox"/> Savings Account (contact your financial institution for Routing #) <input type="checkbox"/> Checking Account (attach a voided check below)		Routing Number: _____ Valid Routing # must start with 0, 1, 2, or 3 Account Number: _____
	I authorize the above organization to process debit entries to my account. I understand that this authority will remain in effect until I provide reasonable notification to terminate the authorization. Authorized Signature: _____ Date: _____		

If using a checking account, please attach a voided check at the bottom of this page.