

by Therese Sherlock, CSJ

Set a table with an open bible, a vase of garden flowers, and a few dry local weeds. Light a candle after the group gathers.

**LEADER:** Let us gather in the wisdom and mystery of our patient God who waits for us to flower. This day, let us look into our own lives, thanking God for the flowers and asking the Spirit to help us see the weeds.

*Reflect silently to identify flowers and weeds in your lives.*

**LEADER:** The reign of God is like someone who sows good seed.

**ALL: Gardener God, you are good and forgiving.**

**LEADER:** Your Spirit searches our hearts and intercedes for us.

**ALL: Gardener God, you are good and forgiving.**

**LEADER:** God, source of life and love, let the gift of your life continue to grow in us, drawing us from death to faith, hope, and love.

**ALL: Keep us alive in Christ Jesus so that your glory will be revealed in us now and forever. Amen.**

Weeding presumes one knows which green stem to pull up. It calls for experience and judgment to say nothing of a deft hand and enough time to be super careful. The parable in Sunday's gospel recommends

July 19, 2020, 16th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Vol. 29, No. 42

# SUNDAY

## by SUNDAY

not weeding at all rather than pulling out the wheat with the weeds.

Most parents caution us not to weed out people in our lives. When I came home complaining about someone, my mom usually said, "They are doing the best they can." My dad often thought people didn't know any better. "They are just ignorant," he'd say. Sometimes I heard the invitation to walk in someone else's shoes. "You don't know what his/her life is like."

Pope Francis is famous for his comment, "Who am I to judge?" Now in *Amoris Laetitia*, his report on the family synod, he is becoming well known for giving people time for grace and growth in their messy lives.

I have a vivid memory of a sister in my novitiate class dueling bible quotes with the young priest teaching us scripture. Sister Jude grew up Baptist and knew her scripture. Father opined that very few people would

actually get to heaven. Sister Jude rose up in her seat to proclaim, "The Lord's mercies are great and his compassion extends to all."

The priest countered, "Many are called but few are chosen." Sister Jude shot back, "The bruised reed God will not break nor snuff the dim wick." The priest countered again, "The way to heaven is narrow and few are they that tread thereon."

Sister Jude took one more stand for mercy before running from the room. We found her later in the coat closet. I'm not sure she ever went back to that class. Her defense of God's mercy helps me remember not to let messages of judgment rather than the balm of mercy take over my consciousness.

● How seriously do you take the message that God loves you, and you can still grow?



# GOSPEL

## Jesus teaches crowds in parables.



## Parables call us to see ourselves as God sees us.

As a gospel writer Matthew is the kind of teacher who reviews the lesson before a test to make sure all the students know the content. Matthew doesn't just tell Jesus' parables but often adds interpretations of them. In Sunday's gospel the disciples ask for an interpretation, the hidden meaning.

The interpretation turns the parable into an allegory, in which the story elements have double meanings; they symbolize something else. The sower is the Son of Man. The field is the world. The good seeds are children of the kingdom; the weeds are children of the evil one. The harvest is the end of the age. Matthew's interpretation turns the parable of the weeds into a scary allegory of end time and judgment.

Matthew's allegories can interfere with our work of using the parable to see ourselves if we think his is its only meaning. Jesus' parable itself may touch us today in new ways.

● What did you hear in the parable of the weeds and wheat before you heard Matthew's explanation?

In the context of Jesus' ministry, the parable of the weeds and wheat addresses the many who criticize Jesus

**NARRATOR:** Jesus put another parable before the crowd.

**JESUS:** The kingdom of heaven may be compared to someone who sowed good seed in his field; but while everybody was asleep, an enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat, and then went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared as well. And the slaves of the householder came to him.

**SLAVES:** Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? Where, then, did these weeds come from?

**MASTER:** An enemy has done this.

**SLAVES:** Then do you want us to go and gather them?

**MASTER:** No, for in gathering the weeds you would uproot the wheat along with them. Let both of them grow together until the harvest. At harvest time I will tell the reapers, "Collect the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn."

**NARRATOR:** Jesus put before them another parable.

**JESUS:** The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

**NARRATOR:** Jesus told them yet another parable.

**JESUS:** The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.

**NARRATOR:** Jesus told the crowds all these things in parables; without a parable he told them nothing. This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet:

**PROPHET ISAIAH:** I will open my mouth to speak in parables; I will proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world.

**NARRATOR:** Then Jesus left the crowds and went into the house. His disciples approached him.

**DISCIPLES:** Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.

**JESUS:** The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom. The weeds are the children of the evil one, and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Matthew 13:24-43

for eating with outcasts and sinners. By eating with those whom others judge to be sinners, Jesus extends God's salvation to everyone. "Let God sort out who is worthy of the kingdom," the parable implies. There may be some real surprises at the final curtain call!

Matthew reflects his own community's disappointment that relatively few Jews embraced Jesus and joined the Christian community. Matthew's explanation calls the community to interiorize the patience of God. God's ways and God's time are often not our ways and our time. The reign of God will come in its own time.

In his apostolic exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis teaches his pastoral approach. "Time is greater than space," he writes, giving priority to processes that build and develop communities over time and that allow time for healing and grace in relationships and families. "Unity is greater than conflict," he insists. "The Spirit can harmonize every diversity." Most of us recognize we so often magnify differences when we have more in common than divides us. A friend wears a sweatshirt that says, "I get plenty of exercise jumping to conclusions, pushing my luck, and dodging deadlines."

● **What judgments about yourself, other people, or about the Church have you**

**made that proved wrong? What changed your perception?**

**E**ach of Sunday's parables describes the kingdom of heaven. In the mustard seed and leaven parables, size and growth are important. A mustard seed is very small in comparison to the size of a grown six-to-eight foot plant! Jesus uses the mystery of how a small seed becomes so big to suggest the living power of God's kingdom that has its own time and great promise in growing.



Leaven becomes invisible in bread dough, but its presence transforms the wheat flour into dough larger and wonderfully airier. The parable calls us to imagine God's power as leaven that functions invisibly, bringing about God's reign.

Life takes time; God's reign will take time. In the end, God's wisdom is not human

wisdom. Some apparent weeds may be flowers. The smallest of seeds may yet grow into a plant that provides hospitality for many creatures.

Leaven may be slowly transforming the world even though human eyes cannot see it working. Such are the mysteries of the reign of God in the human heart and in all creation.

- **What leaven do you hope you are in your community of faith?**
- **What small effort do you hope grows much bigger?**

**J**esus teaches the Galilean crowds in comparisons familiar in their experience. Parables give hearers concrete ways to think about and reflect on what God's kingdom is like.

However, because Jesus' similes for God's reign are so concrete, they challenge us today. People who live in a city may have no experience of wheat and weeds or mustard seeds and mature plants. Farmers today who grow wheat use herbicides to kill weeds without damaging their crops. People who buy bread do not use leaven. The man who sows

## DO SOMETHING

**CHARITY**

**JUSTICE**

- Practice welcoming Sabbath. Take your children or grandchildren picking berries, wild or farmer grown. Make a pie together.
- Share your extra produce with a food shelf—lettuce, peas, beans, strawberries, tomatoes.
- Plan a garden tour with other families. Have each make a dish from a fruit or vegetable the family grows.



the good wheat seed is a master with slaves, a social distinction the United States endured a civil war to end. Inescapably we have to interpret Jesus' parables to bring them into our lives and world.

Nonetheless Jesus' parables can help us see ourselves. We recognize the voice of the self-righteous, saying, "An enemy has done this planting of weeds!" The self-righteous do not consider themselves weeds. By contrast, those who see themselves with God's wisdom might say, "If an enemy has done this, we have seen the enemy and it is us! How can we change?"

The liturgy gathers us as weeds and wheat to reflect together on God's wisdom and our wisdom. The liturgy opens out hope to us, transforming wheat and even our weeds into the Body of Christ, a community of saints and sinners.

- How can you imitate in your relationships the wisdom of the Spirit who searches hearts and prays for us in our weakness?
- What weeds do you notice most in others? What weeds do you notice most in yourself?



## The just must be kind.

Sunday's first reading from Wisdom comes from a long meditation on the exodus, Israel's escape from Egypt that founded them as a people. The Book of Wisdom emerged during the late years before Jesus when people in Israel tended to look

to their past for meaning in a present that seemed marked by God's absence.

So sovereign and powerful is God in the book of Wisdom that mercy is God's second nature. God calls us to participate in the gardening of the kingdom and measure our gardening by God's simple ethic—the just must be kind.

### God is sovereign.

**There is no god besides you whose care is for all people, to whom you should prove that you have not judged unjustly.**

**For your strength is the source of justice, and your sovereignty over all causes you to spare all. For you show your strength when people doubt the completeness of your power, and you rebuke any insolence among those who know it.**

**Although you are sovereign in strength, you judge with mildness, and with great forbearance you govern us; for you have power to act whenever you choose. Through such works you have taught your people that the just must be kind, and you have filled your children with good hope, because you give repentance for sins.**

Wisdom 12.13,16-19

- How does your vision of God resemble or differ from the vision in this passage?
- How has the kindness of others benefitted you?
- How can you treat yourself more kindly?

# PRAY

To conclude your reflection on Sunday's scriptures, prepare to burn dry weed, broken into bits and pieces.

**LEADER:** Wise God, both weeds and flowers grow in us. We come to you in thanks and with the petition that your wisdom become ours.

*Group members put pieces of weed on the fire and name weeds, if they wish.*

**EACH:** May God's wisdom become ours.

**LEADER:** Wise God, you give us good grounds for hope.

**ALL:** Your power is the source of justice.

**LEADER:** You judge with kindness

**ALL:** And govern with forbearance.

**LEADER:** You call the just to be kind.

**ALL:** Spirit of wisdom, you search our hearts and know our weakness. Bless us with wise, just, and kind words and actions toward the people we meet in the week ahead.



*Exchange a sign of peace and blessing.*

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